The Experiences of a Hut Leader At the Front

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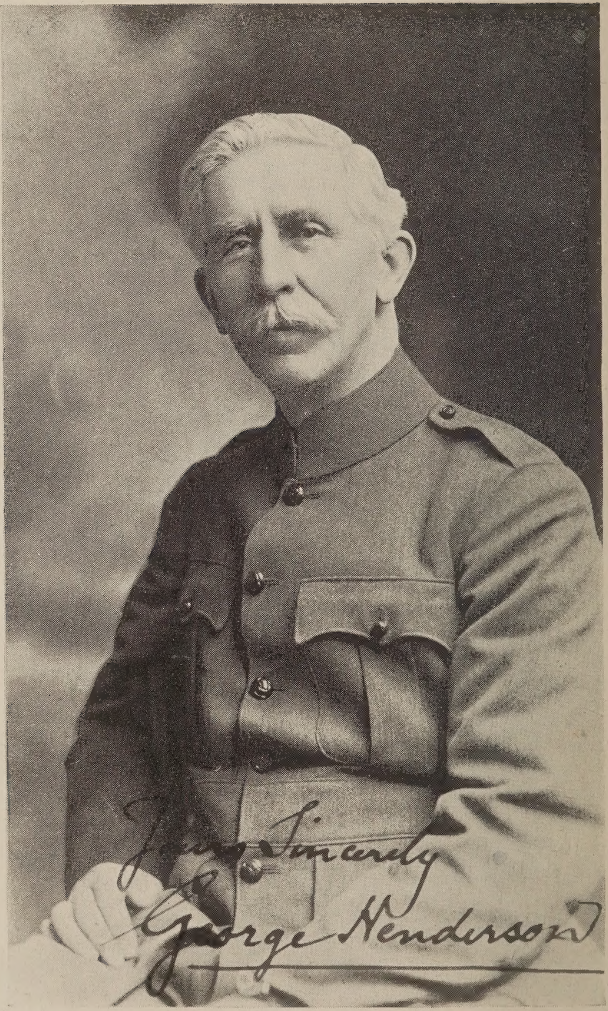

Yours Sincerely
George Henderson

Frontispiece.

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The Experiences of a Hut Leader At the Front

BY THE

REV. GEORGE HENDERSON, B.D.

AUTHOR OF "LADY NAIRNE AND HER SONGS"
"THE BIBLE A REVELATION FROM GOD"
"THE CHILD IN THE MIDST," ETC.

With Illustrations

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TO

My Son

AND

The Brave Lads of my Congregation

WHO, AT THE CALL OF DUTY,
JEOPARDED THEIR LIVES UNTO DEATH
IN THE HIGH PLACES OF THE FIELD

PREFACE

THE writer of this small volume has been induced to publish his experiences as a Hut Leader by many friends who have heard him lecture on the subject at home—partly because the field from a Hut Leader's point of view has not been occupied, but specially as a tribute to the men at the Front to whom, for the privilege and education of service amongst them, he owes a debt of gratitude that has left an ineffaceable mark on his heart and life. Should this little book be the means of promoting sympathy between those at home and the brave lads at the Front who are fighting our battles for us with such wonderful self-sacrifice, endurance, cheerfulness, and hope, it will serve its purpose well, and atone for the imperfection and shortcoming which may be apparent to the eye of the critic.

The author acknowledges the kindness, in reading through the proof, of H. Lightbody, Esq., M.B.E., Hon. General Secretary for Y.M.C.A. in Scotland, who writes :—

"I have read over the proof of your volume, and have enjoyed it exceedingly. It is a most interesting account of your experience, and I feel sure the volume will be very readable and attractive."

UNITED FREE CHURCH MANSE,
MONZIE, PERTHSHIRE,
September, 1918.

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THE JOURNEY TO THE FRONT

THE heavy military great-coat, which forms part of the Y.M.C.A. uniform, was a welcome covering from the snell March wind and icy spray on that memorable afternoon when, in a mixed throng of male workers—with a few ladies—and many "Tommies," we crossed the Channel under escort of several Torpedo Boat Destroyers, wearing on our shoulders and chest cork life-belts, lest our steamer should strike a mine on the way. The Quay at Boulogne as we landed was a scene of confusion, speedily passing, under military discipline, into complete order and uniformity. I spent the night at the Y.M.C.A. Hostel for the relatives of the wounded, who come over by special permit from the War Office, and are met and cared for by the Y.M.C.A. officials, are taken to hospitals where their soldier friends are being treated, and are brought back and sent home next day. It was a touching experience to meet with these sad folk, yet it was a great privilege to offer them words of sympathy, and to lead them to the Throne of Grace in prayer. I found time to visit a "Soldier's Club," which is run with great success by three Scottish ladies under "The Scottish Churches Huts."

My destination was a forward position in the 2nd Army Area, and the railway journey to it was long and indescribably slow. Leaving at 10 A.M., we had a delay *en route* of four hours, and crept on little by little till, at 9.30 P.M., we reached a small town, occupied for a brief space by the Germans in 1914, where, as the train went no further, we were turned out for the night. We had taken eleven and a half hours to come by rail a distance of about eighty miles. When I had passed through, with a crowd of others, the R.T.O.'s (Railway Transport Officer) hands, I found that the two or three available hotels were filled up. An intelligent French boy guided me to "a respectable house." Ascending a few steps off the pavement in a side street, I found myself in the main room of a French Estaminet. Some

"Tommies," among whom I recognised a fellow traveller—a Divisional band-master—were seated at tables, and at the far end of the room was a counter, behind which were various liquors on shelves. The woman in charge led me to a small bedroom, which she said was her son's who was at College, as I saw from the books on the shelf, and she told me also that her husband was serving with the French Colours. In the hurry of an early start next morning, I left my wrist watch behind, but it was afterwards recovered from my description of the house, and safely restored to me by the Hut Leader in the town. The last stage of my journey, about seven miles, I accomplished on a motor lorry—the first of many times I made use of this excellent means of transit. It was interesting to sit in the front seat of the lorry beside the chauffeur, and chat with him on the latest phases of the War in this area, and in the early morning to enter, over rough cobble paving, a town of some 10,000 inhabitants, passing through the central square, with its picturesque Town Hall and church and angular roofs, near which, in silent testimony, were guns recently captured from the Germans, and along the streets, crowded with the traffic of motor lorries, waggons, ambulance cars, and alive with troops going from and to the line.

In B—— that Saturday night two learned Scottish Divines and I saw the Cinema Show run by our Y.M.C.A. Hut, in a large marquee crowded with "Tommies," who had come in long queues past a box where tickets were issued and change given of French for English money with incredible rapidity by an old man called "the Colonel," who cooked for the Mess in the Hut. He had had a strange and eventful history, into which we did not enquire, but one afternoon his son, an officer in the Labour Battalion, of good appearance, came to the Mess in the Hut, and we learned that he was the only relative the old man had in the world. "The Colonel" had to go home to undergo an operation, and died.

Facility in dealing with exchange came slowly at first, and my mistakes were checked by the laughter of our small Belgian orderly, which helped to keep me right. With practice, it became a matter of course to take payment for articles purchased in English money and to give change in French money, as also to change English Postal Orders and cheques.

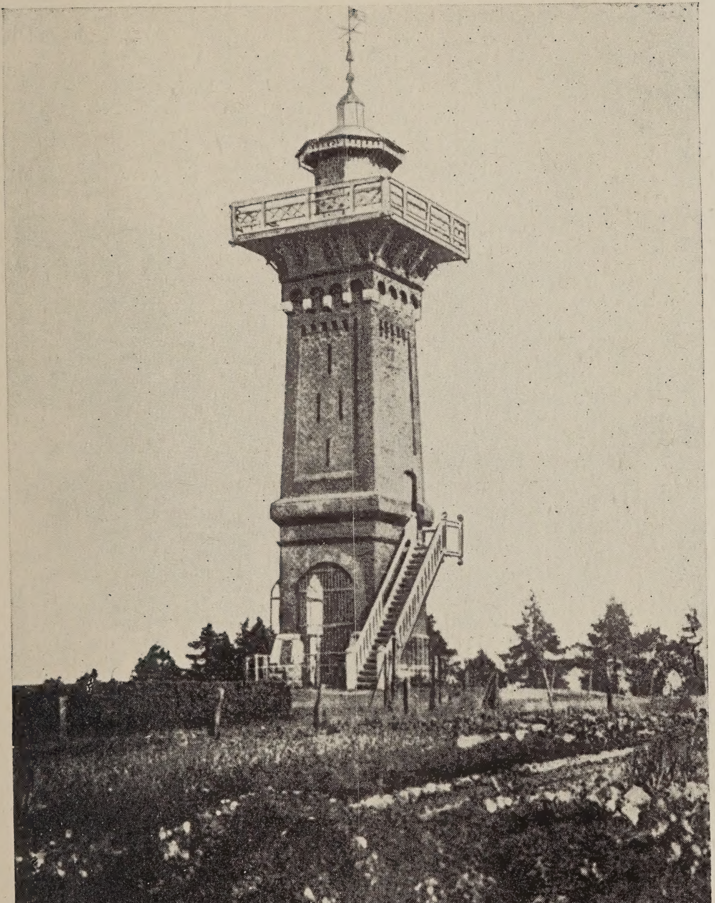
Next morning I went to see a house, the roof of which had been during the night struck by a bomb, killing two soldiers who were billeted there. Being Sunday, we motored to a meeting of Y.M.C.A. workers. Afterwards I was taken, along with a Cambridge Professor, in a car by a leading Y.M.C.A. official, to a village that had scarcely one house intact—familiar to me from the letters of Sir Oliver Lodge's son, published in his book *Raymond,* a place the name of which was hidden in an acrostic by Raymond Lodge when he wrote home. It was very near Y——, the scene of the great recent offensive. While we were inspecting the Y.M.C.A., in an old house covered with sand bags, where hot cups of cocoa were being served out to needy warriors, we could hear the " Swish " and " Whizz " of shells passing over us—so much so that my fellow traveller said on our return journey he was glad to get me safe back. The Y.M.C.A. Hut Leaders in such out-posts are constantly exposed to danger, and carry on their fine work till they break down—as the young Welsh minister here in charge did later on.

The organisation of the Y.M.C.A. is excellent —a chief Secretary and Staff have under them Sub-secretaries with their Staff in each Army area—and thus the work is decentralized and supervised from Headquarters. The secret of success is found in the small beginnings of the work, extending and ramifying with growing opportunity and experience—until now the whole field of warfare is covered. On the way back, my official friend asked me to note facts of my experience as to the religious life of men at the Front, and report. This I have done, and have heard that much of my statement will be incorporated in the General Report on this subject now being prepared at Headquarters.

On that Sunday evening I was present at my first religious service with the "Tommies." There was a large attendance of men of many Churches or no Church, the psalms and hymns were grandly sung, and the earnest, simple address by the Rev. Eric Farrar, son of the late Dean Farrar, was listened to with close attention. Mr. Farrar shared my room for the night; we talked long, and I said, as I recalled the story, "Eric: or Little by Little," written by Dean Farrar, "Your father would have been glad to see you in this work." "Yes," he said.

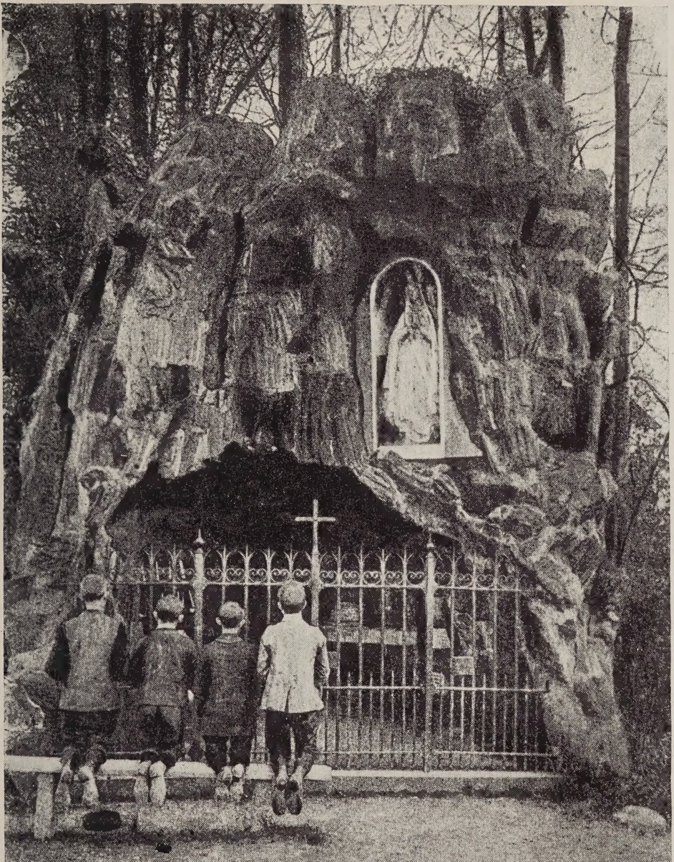
LECTURING AT THE FRONT

It was now arranged that I should lecture here and there in the area, and in my spare time assist in the Hut at Headquarters in B——. In lecturing, I visited several outposts near the Front, sometimes returning to Headquarters, more often remaining overnight. I soon found that the men at the very front were keen for intellectual recreation, *e.g.*, to hear a lecture on " Canada," with slides lent by the Canadian Pacific Railway. It is wonderful how the mind goes at the Front from guns, bombs, and shells, even if a German aeroplane is brought down, as it was in one place just before my lecture, to some theme intellectual, or descriptive, or spiritual, that seems far away from present environment. Is it the longing for change, or is it reaction, or is it familiarity with the rough life of warfare that makes the transition possible?



KEMMEL.—Belvédère (pavilion, look-out).

See p. 8.



Kemmel.—Grotte de Notre Dame de Lourdes.
(Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.)

See p. 9.

It was a wintry time, with blizzards of snow and hail. Perhaps my most interesting lecturing experience was at a village a mile and a half from the German Front. Most of the houses were smashed—some in ruins. The Y.M.C.A. was in what had been the Schoolhouse, a pretty large building—the canteen was in an earthen-floored chamber, the mess room in a cellar beneath, partly for safety—the kitchen behind—the bedrooms upstairs, with open spaces where the windows had been. My first attempt at a lecture here was not successful, for the lantern was out of gear, so we had to give it up. There was a fine audience of Irishmen from the North and South of Ireland, dwelling together in unity, together with a number of Londoners attached to Irish Divisions. I made a short speech, at the request of the Leader of the Hut, calling for cheers for the Canadians for their success at Vimy Ridge, and later I read a passage of Scripture, followed by prayer. There were two dug-outs attached to this Hut—one at the foot of the "communication lines" and one at the "supports." The workers here were a Church of Scotland probationer, a Cambridge student, a United Free Church minister, a Congregational Church minister from East London—a fine set of men. Perhaps a sense of constant danger brings out the grander qualities of manhood. We had supper in the cellar, and, as one of the Staff did not turn up from the dug-out, two of the others went in search of him. During their absence my young Cambridge friend gave me a lesson in a rough and ready manner as to how to put on and wear a gas helmet. Then, to my relief, the three returned—the absentee had been too busy to come sooner. In the morning I went to the small cemetery, with its rows of little white crosses, and found the grave of my cousin—a young, most promising student. The small cross bore his name, date of death, and initials of his regiment, H.A.C. (Honourable Artillery Company). Great guns of a battery hard by were booming constantly—but how peacefully do they sleep who rest after the fight. I came home in a snow-storm; inside the car we were white with snow, and the chauffeur could scarcely see his way through the glass front. In a few days I returned, and, as the lantern behaved well this time, I lectured for an hour on what I had seen and learnt in Canada, and at the close got a rousing cheer. Perhaps the subject was appropriate, for the Canadians have come to the help of the Mother Country with splendid loyalty. Here they fought and suffered, and in our area several of the Huts bear Canadian names. At the commencement of the lecture, the enemy sent over five shells, which did us no harm, but added piquancy and point to the occasion.

Earlier in the afternoon I walked with the Hut-Leader to the farthest out dug-out. After tramping through fields, with mud up to the knees, we entered the trenches called Regent Street, and for a mile walked single file on the duck boards along a winding trench, at a depth of a man's height, until we emerged on what looked like a small Arab village of huts, covered with sand-bags. In the centre was our Y.M.C.A. dug-out—a kitchen, with a small sleeping bunk off, and through it a canteen or cellar crowded with Tommies. We were now 300 yards from the German front, just over a small hill. Next morning I walked a mile out round " Suicide Corner," so named from frequent sniping there, to the second Y.M.C.A. dug-out at the support lines. That same afternoon our battery there was heavily bombarded. These dug-outs are now closed down.

On the way home we motored through a party of " Tommy " road menders, renewing the road, as was being done in all the important avenues of transport to the Front, under cover of leafy-like screens as a protection from German shells. Our Army is constantly engaged in the secondary work of preparing and facilitating the business of War.

A CASUALTY CLEARING STATION AT THE FRONT

In B—— there were two Casualty Clearing Stations, one in a large Boys' School in the centre of the town, the other in the former Lunatic Asylum, a little way out, near the Frontier. On a sunny afternoon I visited the latter station, by arrangement with the Chaplain, who took me round. The traffic on the road running north-west of the main street, towards Y——, the scene of many battles, was dense and constant. I threaded my way through lines of motor lorries, cars, bicycles, men on the march, on foot, and on horseback, and passed through a gate to the right into the quiet of an avenue leading through pleasant grounds, with plots of roses and flowers, patches of grass and shrubs, to the main building, with its various annexes scattered around. I found the Chaplain in the Orderly Office, and together we made a round of the different wards in the station. I was greatly impressed with the fine accommodation, organisation, and arrangement for the great work to be done in the earlier stages of casualty for the wounded and the suffering. The stairs to the upper wards would present a little difficulty in carrying patients up and down, but it was evident that the whole was being splendidly done. Efficiency, order, and quiet were everywhere present, and the best skill of the R.A.M.C., in the person of distinguished British surgeons, was at the service of the suffering and trying cases that came under their hands.

The organisation and efficiency for the care of the wounded at the Casualty Clearing Station, the Hospital at the Base, and the Hospital within our shores at home are beyond all praise—as I have found from what I have seen and learned in the history of individual cases coming under my notice. I was delighted to find that the Matron and one of the Sisters were Scotswomen—from Glasgow and Paisley. They, too, were highly qualified and experienced for their most difficult and trying duties, so kindly and cheerfully done. We talked of " bonnie Scotland " and the work of the station. They said they were greatly in want of old illustrated magazines for the men in hospital, and I promised to keep them supplied for a time. Through the kindness of the ladies of "The Soldiers' Recreation Fund," in response to my letter in the newspaper, parcels of magazines were sent to my care, and distributed.

A "C.C.S." at the Front is not like an hospital at home. The cases brought in are so terrible, and so fresh, and so numerous. The wounds are so various from the instruments of war. The sights at first are almost overwhelming, until one begins to realise the remedial and practical nature of the work for the relief of suffering and the comfort of the wounded, and until one, following in the steps of the Master, tries to whisper a few words of sympathy, brotherly-kindness, and prayer in the ear of the sufferer. There, as always, the spirit of the men was splendid. The dressing of wounds I saw going on must have been excruciating, as the brave Tommy, with eyes closed, held the hand of the Sister while it was being done, but no complaint nor moan escaped his lips. As I passed through these wards of sufferers I felt myself in an atmosphere of patience, endurance, and cheerfulness that made it easy to speak the words of comfort and hope.

A side ward was reserved for officers, and here I found, to my surprise, a young Lieutenant whom two days before I had met at lunch in town. He had passed up to the line that night and been wounded by a trench mortar. How little does the young officer know what a day or an hour may bring forth. So we recalled our little talk and spoke of our unexpected meeting in very different circumstances, and a serious note was touched in these few words of bedside conversation.

I came away from those pathetic and trying scenes with a feeling of thankfulness that there is a remedial element in life for the sin and the suffering of humanity through the love and goodness of God in the service of man.

"Wrath, by His meekness,
And, by His health, sickness,
Are driven away
From our immortal day."

"The healing of the world
Is in its nameless saints."

"If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain."

SOME PERSONAL INCIDENTS AT THE FRONT

AT the Front one never ceases to wonder at the way in which, at the call of the nation, the youth of our land have been gathered from all ranks of civil life, and, after being passed through military training and discipline, have been turned out as an army of soldiers, where all class distinctions are forgotten in the camaraderie and brotherhood of War. A young "Tommy" from the lines, wet and muddy, enters the hut, throws off his heavy equipment, comes to the counter for a cup of tea, and in conversation you learn that he is a minister of the Church of Scotland who has been serving in the ranks for two years. You accost a youth who is washing out a motor lorry with a mop, and find to your surprise that he is a third year theological student of the United Free Church, who, being rejected for weakness of eyes from over-study, was accepted for motor lorry work, and likes it well. You speak to a third man, and find he is a professional tenor singer. You meet with men from Dundee, Aberdeen, Glasgow. A smiling youth who comes up to you, whom you fail at first to name in khaki, turns out to be the former organist in your church, now a signaller at wireless work. He comes again and again, and at last he is moved, and when he goes you wish him luck and give him a small present. Later you hear he has been wounded. You may meet at supper a Major from the South of Scotland, who has been in the War since the commencement, and before that was through the South African War. He has risen from the ranks, and his chest is lined half-way across with coloured ribbons of war distinctions. How much he can tell you! Or you may have a C.C. (Camp Commandant) over you who has fought under Sir A. Hunter in South Africa, and was shut up in Ladysmith with Sir George White, and how finely he speaks of both these eminent soldiers. He will try to make things go pleasantly for you, will give you orderlies, will tell you to use the Divisional Officer's baths, will come to your

Communion Service, and talk to you about it, reverently and quietly, and be often in your Hut.

Or you have a Scottish officer high in the Division—a Colonel—who has been over the world, and who chats with you when he looks in at your Hut about your own part of Scotland. He will furnish you with a permit to ride on any motor in the course of duty, and is always ready to give you a lorry or a waggon to fetch your stores.

One day a " Tommy " came to me and said he wanted to speak with me alone. He was a little, middle-aged man, a Londoner, of not prepossessing appearance, but with the usual simple, straight talk and manner of the true soldier. He told me that he wished to marry a French girl living in the village where he had been billeted for a year. The girl, he said, also wished to marry him. The paternal advice I offered and the difficulties I put in the way seemed only to add fuel to the fervour of his love. I promised to make enquiries as to military and French ecclesiastical law, and bade him come again and see me. I consulted my

C.C. friend, who told me the military authorities would not recognize the marriage until he took his wife to London, but that they did not oppose it. The French Curé (priest) whom I knew said that, while the Roman Catholic Church did not favour mixed marriages, the Bishop would probably not oppose, but the consent of the father must first be obtained, and the children must be brought up as Roman Catholics. When my "Tommy" friend returned, I explained to him the situation, military and ecclesiastical, and, as he was still of the same mind, I advised him to consult the parents of the girl, and, if the father gave his consent, the Curé of the diocese where she lived would marry them after informing the Bishop. He came back soon and said that the father had threatened to shoot him, that he had turned the girl out of the house, and she had found a home with a sister. I set about trying to get laundry work for her. Soon after, he came back and said:

"I think it's all off, sir."

"Why?" said I.

"Because she has an offer from a French-man, and she thinks it will be better for her to marry him."

"So do I," I replied, "and don't you think so too?"

"Yes sir," he said; "perhaps it will be best."

We met again after this, and smiled—but the love story never came up—which is just like the true Tommy who, being done with a thing, is done with it.

AN AFTERNOON WALK SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

After a month's lecturing and Hut work at B——, I was sent to be Hut Leader in a large village about three miles from the Front. Having the afternoon free one day, I set out for a walk to the outlying huts which stretch out to the third lines of the Front. It was a lovely afternoon, bright and sunny, rather warm for the long round I was going to make. But nature, after refreshing rain, was bursting into leaf and blossom. For the nonce one seemed to forget the sounds of war in the vision of green hedge-rows, leafing elms, cherry, pear, and peach trees in their white garb of purity, innocence, and peace. Swallows flocked and twittered in the sunshine, blackbirds were nesting, and a lark's song thrilled defiantly over green fields in the free air of heaven. The mind and heart rest for a little time on the placid, fruitful bosom of nature, and are refreshed.

War may deface or defile the fair visage of nature, but it cannot destroy her pure and lovely spirit.

I reach a Y.M.C.A. Hut called "Haeri Mai" ("Welcome here"), built by friends in New Zealand for their brave lads, and now passed over to the Y.M.C.A. Strange Maori figures and devices were painted on the outside. Inside was a scene of stir, movement, and comfort. The Hut was temporarily, in the absence of the Leader, a Scotsman on furlough, under the care of a Church of Scotland minister and a minister of the United Methodist Church. I lunched here in the small back room, the camp beds being folded up in the corner to make room for tables and chairs. After lunch, one of these hosts accompanied me on a visit to their three outlying Huts nearer the lines. We walk on to the cross-roads, and are stopped by the sentry: "Can't let you pass, gentlemen; road being shelled;" but we are on duty, so the Corporal lets us pass on. Shells are loud and frequent to our right, and seem to fall on a neighbouring village. We pass a field with many fresh holes, edged with broken hedges and shattered trees. Two lonely crosses silently mark two graves. They bear the strange names of two Indian soldiers who had sheltered in a neighbouring roadside shrine, and fell fighting. Further on we light on four more little crosses with Scotch names, fallen in 1915, early in the War.

We have now reached the third line, and are about a mile from the front line. Shells are whizzing overhead from both sides, German and British. Our Y.M.C.A. dug-out is in a large, old, deserted, shelled farmyard. We stoop to enter a narrow doorway, and stand in a dimly lighted chamber, with corrugated iron roof—sandbagged at the entrance. An acetylene light hangs over the counter; a cheery orderly is serving out cocoa to his few begrimed customers, whom he addresses as " Chum," and we join in the simple, frank, straight talk on recent local events and incidents, and in some amusing chaff on the attractive powers of men from the North of England. We strike across along a wooded road, and pick up a few bits of recent missiles. Overhead soars an aeroplane, pursued by the sharp reports of anti-aircraft guns, leaving their dirty puffs of smoke in the clear sky—the deadly thrust of human invention into the clear, unstained heavens. The shrapnel is bursting right overhead, but none of it falls on us. We reach a second dug-out like the last, and pass on to a third, which is a complete Hut among our batteries, near to a farm house not much damaged as yet. The shading, overhanging trees, in leaf and blossom, offer a picturesque site for a busy Hut.

My guide leaves me here and I return alone, my mind reflecting on thoughts stirred by this strange, interesting, and fascinating life. The afternoon is very hot. I pause to look at the wonderful machinery of an anti-aircraft gun and the instruments of an " observing " station, and then reach my billet in the village, where it is delicious to lave face and hands in a diminutive basin with a little water.

And so, as Pepys would say, back to my own Hut, with its duties of counter sales, classes for British and French, evening prayers, talk with the men, finance, stores, and endless items of work, that take one entirely out of the rut of home life, and remind one of our Lord's great words and act, " I am not come to be ministered unto but to minister."

On Sunday one of the Chaplains has asked me to take Parade Service here at 9.30 A.M. At 11 we have our workers' devotional meeting, and in the evening I have service at 6.30, and it will be followed by Communion.

Amid the strife of men and the fierce struggle of war, the inner life is conscious that above the tumult there is a Guide and beyond it Peace.

This evening we have had a rush of battery men, fresh from Scotland, one of them from my native town, and bearing my own name! How their faces light up when they hear their own tongue and talk of their own town and its people and their ways.

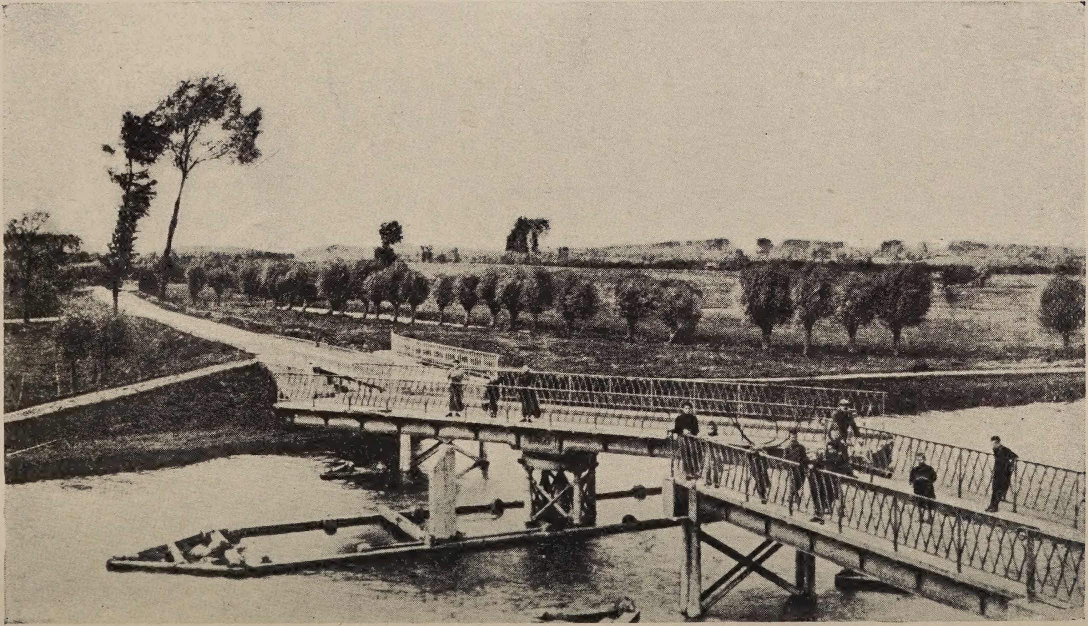
" Home, home, to my heart cheering,
Still in thy bosom I'll rest."

MY BILLET AND MESS

AT the Front the Hut-worker generally sleeps and eats in an annex of the Hut. In cold, wet weather his domicile is far from the comfort, cleanliness, and condition of his life at home. It is often not wind and rain proof, and in winter the cold is sometimes intense. Even in the warmer seasons of the year, he has to rough it, doing his own work and cooking his own food. In the end of March, when lecturing at outposts, I slept on several occasions in a room with no glass in the windows, through which the snow blew in cooling gusts, while I lay under a covering of as many rugs and overcoats as I could lay hands on. To the young and strong there is a fine, bracing effect in " roughing " it. Even some men, brought up in luxury and encircled with the means of happiness, find a joy that thrills in endeavour and difficulty, in self-sacrifice and endurance. But for many of the workers the toil and strain and privation of Hut-life is too much, and they break down. To me the lines fell in pleasant places. In the town which was my headquarters for the first month, I was for the first few nights billeted in a hotel, so called, very primitive and simple in its accommodation and sanitation, but comfortable and homely. The Town Major, who had charge of all the billeting in the town, had, at the request of the Y.M.C.A. Secretary, to grant a permit to use this billet, at the normal charge of one franc a night. At my meals here I used to meet many officers coming and going, and talk to the French people of the town who came to table d'hôte. The food was good, if somewhat unvaried. The life during the short period of my stay there was interesting and enjoyable, but too expensive for prolongation. My son, who came out as 2nd Lieutenant, R.F.A., on Christmas Day, 1914, and is now Captain on the Staff of the 2nd Army Corps, R.A., rolled up one day in a Staff car to the door of our Hut. His coming was like a breath of home—like a breeze, clear, fresh, and bracing, from our Scottish hills. The ties of Scottish manse home life bind parents and children closely together, and at the Front they become doubly strong. A meeting of father and son in these scenes at the Front, in which the paternal seems to merge into the fraternal, is a joy that nothing can mar and none can take away. In the strain and friction and sometimes weariness of Hut-life, it doeth good like a medicine. Ah! how many of these ties have been cruelly snapped in this War, and the wounded heart seeks for the lost part, and the tear-dimmed eyes strain and see beyond. As aide-de-camp to the R.A. General of the Division, my son had spent six weeks in the town where he found me, and he easily gave me the entrée to several nice French families whom he had known. In one of these homes, where he had his office, there was, fortunately, a vacant bedroom, which, through the application of the Y.M.C.A. Secretary to the Town-Major, was allocated to me. Here for a month I had a most comfortable billet, at the usual fixed military charge of one franc a night, with a little extra voluntarily paid for attendance. It was even luxurious, for a cup of tea was brought to me in the morning while dressing, and I had the use of a Sitz-bath, opportunely left behind by my military predecessor.

My Mess, during the first month of my service in this town, was for the most part at Y.M.C.A. Headquarters for the area, which were in a small, high house, centrally situated in the main street, the well-known and homely red triangle conspicuously shown in the front window. Entering by a narrow lobby, often cumbered with the kit of new workers and boxes, one found, to the right, an office of small dimensions, with little free space after allowing for a couple of desks, and parcels of all kinds constantly coming and going from or to the Huts round the area. Along the walls were pigeon-holes in tiers, bearing the names of Huts and men in the area, and containing letters for them, which were distributed from time to time at their proper destination by one of the H.Q. motor cars. How kindly are one's memories of that little office with its pigeon-hole gift of home letters, and its meetings of busy workers from the outposts with their news of incidents at the Front. Behind the office was the Mess-room, looking out on a narrow lane and a stone wall. Behind the Mess-room, and up a few steps, were the kitchen and rooms, occupied by an old couple who spoke Flemish, a sprightly and ever cheerful maid of all work, who spoke French to us and Flemish to the old folks, and Mr. ——, our Mess caterer, an Englishman, whose experience as a butler in Ireland enabled him to purvey excellent food, and whose pleasant, kindly face, as he gave us our places at table and called on the President to say grace, was quite a feature of the Mess. I have seen him, too, in spare time helping at the Central Stores and handling heavy boxes to be given out to those waiting for them.

Our Mess table at Y.M.C.A. H.Q. was always full, and some had to go out for a meal. Generally, unless on his rounds, the Secretary of the area presided. He was eminently fitted for his post—a South Australian, who had seen Y.M.C.A. service in Australia and South Africa—a man in the prime of life, of tireless energy, tact, and bonhomie, ready to cope with the many difficulties arising daily, and to enter at the doors of new opportunity opening before his eager and watchful mind. At table his genial face and cheery talk were a healthy tonic to all, while his orders were so considerate of the qualities of the worker that it was a pleasure to obey. Others at Mess were four members of the Finance Staff, two or three chauffeurs of the Y.M.C.A. cars, constantly running hither and thither on roads bad or good, exposed to danger or free from it, one or two other clerks, and several Hut-workers, arriving and to be allocated, or departing. A Cambridge Professor, who had come out to lecture, billeted like myself in town, would drop in to tea or supper, and sometimes after it give a talk in the Mess-room upon his researches ethnological in New Guinea. The Finance Staff had their office upstairs, where they handled and sorted piles of Postal Orders, Cheques, French notes, and English money, to a very large amount, the weekly drawings collected from the Huts in the area, and where they dealt with all the huge business of the canteens and its many departments. Still higher up was the Secretary's office, where the click of his typewriter, worked by a clerk, was heard as he dictated correspondence, and listened to the talk of those who saw



Sailly-sur-la-Lys.—La Pont tournant (the turning bridge).

See p. 33.

him on business or sought his advice. Some of the Staff, indeed most of them, had been rejected as unfit for military service, others were exempted for Y.M.C.A. service. Sometimes we had good humoured chaff, sometimes a little argument, but always the camaraderie of liberty, equality, fraternity. Frequently, to make room for others, I had meals outside.

In the village where my lot was cast for the latter period of service of two and a half months my billet and mess were somewhat different. A gentleman, to whom I was introduced by a French family in the town I had left, offered me a room in what had been his pretty chateau with a nice garden, but now, after months of military occupation, so despoiled, disfigured, and soiled as to be almost uninhabitable. The Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. sub-area, of which our village was the centre, in search of a billet for me, came to the house of the Curé, or Roman Catholic priest, where he and his brother, the Vicaire, and their sister, somewhat reluctantly perhaps, with inquiries as to what a Y.M.C.A. was, consented to take me in. The room was at least tolerably clean, the bed had a mattress with no pillows nor blankets, the window pane was broken. But deficiences were soon to some extent supplied, and here I slept peacefully for three nights, during which I established friendly relations with my hosts and hostess which lasted to the end of my time in the village. It soon became apparent that Mademoiselle was too old to do the house work for three men, and when she offered to find another billet for me where I should have better attendance and more comfort, I assented. Her brother, the Vicaire, took me along to a house in the main street, and commended me to the care of two elderly women of his flock, with due admonition to attend to all my wants in the best way they could. They were sisters; one married, her husband killed in the War, the other unmarried. Gradually improvements were effected; sheets were added to the bed, the floor was scrubbed, a tub of water for a bath was occasionally procured. My windows opened on the main road to Armentières and Estaires, which, from the constant traffic on it, sent up clouds of dust. When motor lorries heavily laden with shells passed in the small hours, the house shook, and the tremor of the long procession of eight or ten at a time used to wake me up till they had passed, and then I dropped to sleep till another series came by. To the School opposite my billet the children came daily, and the people for frequent religious services, as their church had been demolished, especially on Sunday, when Mass was three times observed, gathered in large numbers. It was pleasant to hear the bell for early prayers before I got up, and to watch the people dismissing from Church while I dressed. A simple, devout folk, in their plain, but neat and clean, Sunday clothes, they seemed to be, as, having laid aside their toil, they assembled for worship and prayer—suggestive of Millet's picture "The Angelus."

We were at the centre of an important district in the area, so we had a Y.M.C.A. Mess in the back room of a small house opposite our Hut. Off the Mess-room was the kitchen, and upstairs were several bedrooms, occupied by some of our staff. The tenants of the house were two French women, sisters, who for a small payment gave us the use of the Mess-room and cooked for our Mess. The younger one was married;

her husband had been a prisoner on the Rhine since the beginning of the War; her children were in a small town some miles away with the grand-parents, where from time to time she was allowed to visit them by permit. The front room they used as a shop for the sale of linen and cotton articles of clothing for women and children. When occasional visitors and Y.M.C.A. officials dropped in upon us for a meal, we were allowed to invade the shop, as the Mess-room was much too small for company in addition to ourselves. Besides the Sub-secretary and one or two other rather nondescript odd officials waiting to be sent elsewhere, there were two of us from our Hut, and one other worker from a neighbouring Hut, who came to dinner. Generally there were five or six of us—sometimes more, sometimes less.

Our Sub-secretary was a Scotsman with a pretty long Y.M.C.A. experience in England. He recalled our meeting eleven years ago in the train on our way to the United Free Church of Scotland Guild Conference at Aberdeen, he as delegate, I as President, and said that our conversation then had helped to lead him to go in for Y.M.C.A. work. He was always calm, clear, and capable of facing and overcoming difficulties. He had acquired little French, and his directions as Mess President to Madame in English with a few words in the vernacular thrown in were amusing, but generally well understood. One of the last things he asked me to do was to help him to settle a transaction and come to terms with a French agent about the rent outstanding for a large shed that had been used for the Y.M.C.A. Cinema.

The sub-officials were young. One was a Cambridge student, who had a fancy to study German. He was pretty tall, wore spectacles, stooped a little, and, in a rather shabby uniform, his appearance was not prepossessing. We used to chaff him about getting his hair cut. He was not devoid of intellectual force and go, which appeared in arguments and in the crude, erratic opinions of the Varsity undergraduate. He had been arranging libraries for the Huts, and latterly took some interest in games. But he had far too much spare time, and we felt it was good for him when he was suddenly moved for Hut work in an advanced post, where probably he would find himself and do good work. One missed his cheery, frank, rather juvenile manner and the ideas and thoughts that emanated from his young and immature mind. The other quasi sub-official, also young, but not so interesting and attractive as his fellow, seemed to have been wandering about the Y.M.C.A. world of France, picking up some French and some information as he went, and to have reached us in not very good health. He used to spend a considerable part of his time reading on the shady side of the Hut—perhaps he felt ill or had nothing to do. My colleagues in the Hut changed several times as they were sent off to other jobs. They were all excellent men, a Congregational minister from England, of a fine, cultured, earnest type, a Methodist from New Zealand, an engineer intending to become a minister—a strong temperance man, a minister of my own Church, with whom I had the pleasantest fellowship and much intercourse in common. Our other Mess-fellow was a Church of England clergyman, gentlemanly, fond of a joke.

When our Sub-secretary was called away, I was made Hut Leader, and became Mess President. It was my duty to see to the rations, to pay Madame her weekly bill, and see that the billets were properly paid for. We had to send an orderly every Thursday for our rations, with an indent showing the number in our Mess to be fed, to the Rail Head, two miles off. A note of the food to be supplied was filled in at the Rations Office, and the various items on the list were given out at the Store. They were plentiful, but generally the same—a large roast of frozen meat, a few potatoes, four or five loaves, some margarine, a few onions, a piece of cheese, a small piece of bacon, sometimes a few raisins or oranges, cigarettes and matches, and some Quaker Oats. The roast was cut up by us in three pieces, to last three days. We had it hot at dinner and cold at supper. For breakfast we had porridge, an egg, and tea; for dinner, soup and meat, with now and again a tin of preserved pears or peaches from our own canteen; for tea, we had bread and biscuits and tea; for supper, cold meat or eggs, with coffee or Horlick's Milk, which was a great stand by at the end of the day.

The rations were generally dropped into a small sack which the orderly held open to receive them, one on top of the other—meat, butter, bacon, potatoes, cheese, etc., a mixed and uninviting assortment. One day, instead of meat, came four rabbits, at which Madame shook her head and said she could do nothing with them. So I called in the help of the Salvage Corps Cook, who speedily prepared them for the pot, and provided a palatable change in our fare for that day.

Mess time came round with welcome regularity in the busy toil of those days, with its food and rest, its good fellowship and merry laugh—an interlude that helped much to carry us through the strain and effort from morning to night. Often we had to entertain visitors—officials from Head-quarters and workers with them. Then earnest consultations took place with Madame, and additional supplies were procured from the shelves of our canteen to make a decent " spread." Sometimes we had officers on the move as guests. One day a young officer arrived on horseback with his orderly in search of beer for their battalion. They had been in action for days and nights, he said, had suffered heavy losses, and were dead beat, so the Colonel was giving the men a concert, and wanted beer for them. He had come a good many miles, and would have to go further we knew, so we asked him to dine with us, while his orderly was invited to the Salvage Mess behind. We gave him of our best. He was only nineteen—a Captain. He had come out at the beginning of the War as a drummer boy, and had been through the whole campaign unhurt. What an experience he had had. It had made a man of him, older looking than he ought to be, with a serious, strong face. How touched he was with our slight hospitality, and how nice in his expression of gratitude. I should like to see him again. Is he still to the fore—I wonder?

On a hot afternoon two young officers appeared in the Hut, asking for a meal of any kind. They were brothers, one Lieutenant, the other Sergeant; they had not met for two years, both fighting in France, and by travelling many miles they had managed a rencontre, and they wanted some food. I took them to our Mess-room and prevailed on Madame to give them a good tea, with eggs and fruit and cigarettes, and left them there—those two brothers who had not seen each other for two years on the battlefield in France—to enjoy one another over a refreshing cup of tea. How happy they were and how grateful.

At supper one night, about 9.30, the door opened and my son appeared, and with him an old Edinburgh University chum, a frequent visitor at our Manse at home, who had come from forestry work at the Gold Coast to serve in France. My son and he had forgathered in the North, and had made a run of some fifteen miles by motor over rough roads to see me. My Mess mates considerately beat a retreat, and left us there to talk of home and work and the prospects of war over our rough and ready supper table. It was a brief half-hour visit, for they had to get back to the Corps H.Q. with the aid of my directions over that rough and devious track, leaving behind them, however, with me as I went out into the star-light, that personal touch of sympathy and affection that makes one feel how good and sweet and hopeful life is:

> "I speak of one from many singled out,
> One of those heavenly days that cannot die."

A DAY'S WORK

My Hut was a large double one, on a fine site, a little back from the main road to Armentières. The door in the middle opened into the canteen, off which was a writing room and the Leader's room. Adjoining the canteen, and connected by a gang-way, was the concert hut, with a small stage at one end, behind which our orderlies slept. At the other end was our store-room, with tiers of biscuit and cigarette boxes and shelves and presses laden with goods of a smaller kind. At the end of the canteen was the billiard table, near which were stands for newspapers, and in a press with locked glass doors our library. A few lounge chairs were scattered about, into which the Tommies used to sink and go to sleep. At the other end of the canteen was the counter, and behind it, on several rows of shelves, a tempting display of our stores of all kinds—paper and envelopes (supplied gratis), pencils, boot-laces, blacking, brushes, minor medicines, biscuits, cigarettes, tobacco, pipes, button cleaners, matches, tinned salmon, herring, sardines, peaches, pears, apricots, cake, the four gospels (supplied gratis), etc., etc. Then there were our urn for tea and an old liqueur barrel, painted green, for lemonade. The passage behind the counter led into the kitchen, which had a large boiler where we boiled the water for tea, and used after it was cold for lemonade. As the wells were condemned as insanitary, no water was used till boiled or chlorined.

It will be seen that our Hut was large, convenient, and commodious. The canteen was first of all built by the military, who passed it over to the New Zealand Y.M.C.A. for troops from the Colony, and they added to it the concert hut and writing and retiring rooms. It was nicely decorated with little flags, and was commended by the officials for its cleanness and general attractiveness. It catered for a splendid Division—the 57th—comprising North Lancashires, West Riding, Liverpool Scottish, moving up and down, and we had besides the stationary Sanitary, Ambulance, Balloon, and

Battery Sections. For ten days we had a battalion of Portuguese, poor in equipment and outfit compared to our soldiers, but pleasant and respectful even under the canteen restrictions for them, which we found it necessary to impose. It was a pleasure to serve these men, though sometimes it was very hard work, when fifty of them came on their way to or from their bathe in the river, or in the evening when off duty they filled up the Hut and stood three deep at the counter. Lemonade or tea we served to them from one end of the counter as they came for it in a queue, and cigarettes and other goods from the other end. The labour of selling was greatly increased by the necessity of taking English silver and giving back the change in French money, or of changing the 5-franc notes in which the men received their pay. Often, too, we had to change English Postal Orders, giving the proper French equivalent. Sales at high pressure, under such conditions as to numbers and speed, with the hindrance of financial exchange, sometimes imposed a strain of protracted mental and physical alertness that left one limp and fagged, and, at the end of the day, ready to go to bed.

Our business was, however, by no means so excessive as in some other Huts, amounting to from 200 to 600 francs a day. This would imply a visit from about 1,500 buyers in the day, besides many more who would use the Hut but did not buy. Business of this amount had the great advantage of giving time for converse with the men—a valuable part of Hut work. Besides counter work, the shelves had to be constantly filled up with goods from the store-room, necessitating the lifting and opening of heavy boxes, and the supply of lemonade and tea had to be watchfully maintained. Woe betide the man who let the urn or the barrel run dry. The drawings of cash for the day had to be counted and carefully tabulated. At the end of the week statements had to be prepared, showing amounts for each day taken in English and French money, and Postal Orders, with the petty cash transactions and expenditure, and the whole of the money had to be packed up in a box ready for the official who called for it on Monday. In short, the Hut Leader had to run a shop doing a large business. He had the help, probably, as I had, but not always, of an assistant and of two orderlies, one of whom, however, might go on leave, and he had to take his full share of counter work with the rest. But, besides this, he was responsible for the supervision and management of the Hut, and of all that went on in it from day to day. As Hut Leader, I had also to run a buffet a mile off on the main road, in front of the Divisional theatre, under the care of an orderly, who did a large business, and daily came to hand in his drawings and receive fresh stores.

It may be asked how a Hut Leader's day is filled up. Before breakfast I used to look in to see that the orderlies had done their work—that the Hut was swept, boiler fire lighted, and everything ready for the opening and business of a new day. There was time for a glance at the English newspapers of the previous day or the French ones of the same day, which came early at breakfast. By 9 o'clock we were ready to begin the day's work in the canteen. Perhaps the previous night I had telephoned from the Area office to Divisional Headquarters to ask the favour of a motor lorry to go to B—— for stores, and to report at the Hut at 8.30 A.M., a request generally granted if the lorry was back by 2 or 3 P.M. Failing a lorry, a 2-horse waggon might be got from the Divisional Train Head-quarters. The 3-ton lorry, with its chauffeur on the front seat and assistant inside, will turn up to the minute. A motor lorry ride for stores at the Front is always interesting. It is a change from the Hut routine. There is much to be noticed on the road, the traffic, the men on the march; the accompaniments of war, aeroplanes, balloons, even shells; holes, ruts, and pools of water to be negotiated by careful steering; chats with the chauffeur, who may be a Cockney; the scenery, fields, river, trees, hedges in flat country; a picturesque church-tower, an outstanding landmark; the village narrow streets traversed; and again out on the main road. We are about an hour and a half on the journey of seven or eight miles, and reach the well-known streets of the town of B—— about 10 o'clock, densely filled with traffic and men, making it difficult for us to reach the Stores.

They have been moved to new quarters. The store manager, in the confusion of the flitting, is not in the best of temper. We cajole and bully him, and, with the help of the French boys, to whom he shouts his orders in French, we load up with boxes of all kinds, and after perhaps a delay of three hours we are ready to get under way. There may be time for some lunch, or one may have to rush to the Town Major's office and telephone to Divisional Head-quarters to ask an extension of time for the lorry, owing to emergency and unavoidable delay. This may or may not be granted. Anyhow, we roll back full, having come in empty, and, calling on the way home at the Divisional H.Q., we briefly explain the situation in person to the powers that be, and all is well. After arriving at the Hut about 3 o'clock, the stores have to be unloaded and arranged, and in the midst of this work an officer may appear to cash a cheque. Canteen work is resumed till tea time. After tea the Divisional band may arrive for a concert, and they have to be prepared for and thanked and entertained. A French class or a Bible class may come on.

There is more counter work or conversation; at 8 o'clock comes evening prayer; and at 8.30 P.M. closing. After the making up of cash, with entries, comes supper about 9 o'clock, followed by a walk in the cool air before getting to bed. It has been a long, full, active, busy day of engrossing interest and employment, and at the end of it one is tired but happy.

> **"Each dawn is as a welcome door,**
> **Each humblest act the wondrous key**
> **Of infinite opportunity."**

OUR HUT LIBRARY

MANY of the men at the Front were keen readers. We took in seven or eight newspapers daily and set them upon stands, with a request that they should not be removed. We had also a table covered with old magazines and illustrated papers. But we had besides a Library of some six hundred volumes—biography, history, science, and fiction. The book-case was the handiwork of an ingenious orderly, who had done his best with the materials at his disposal to produce something, if not quite artistic, at least serviceable for the purpose. It had a good lock, the key of which we kept at the counter. The reader deposited one franc, chose his book, and entered his name, with the title of the book and the date, in the library register. When he had ceased taking out books, his deposit of a franc was returned to him.

As at home, the books oftenest read were the best novels by "Ralph Connor," Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray, but more solid books of history and biography were not infrequently asked for. Little wonder, for our Army has drawn into its ranks men of education and intellectual gifts. I found on our library table the MS. of original verses of no mean order of poetry. One poem I remember on the irrevocable past, or some such title, telling of sunshine and seed lost and wasted in years now gone beyond recall, the pathos of which was not lit by one ray of hope. I pinned the MS. on the wall beside the table in my small room and left it there. Often in conversation one found oneself in contact with the keen, well-read, well-furnished minds of a teacher, a student, or a doctor.

When the soldier is off duty, or in rest, his mind, if he is thoughtfully inclined, will turn to books. As Philip Bailey says of books: "They are solitudes; we lose ourselves in them, and all our cares." The soldier will hardly say, with Disraeli, that a book may be as great a thing as a battle, but he will agree with Henry Drummond that a book may be a new friend by your side always, who, when life grows narrow and weary, will take you into his wider, calmer, and higher world. "It's a jolly good book, sir," a reader will say in response to your query how he has liked it, reminding one of the lines of the old English song:

> "O for a booke and a shadie nooke,
> Eyther in-a-doore or out,
> With the grene leaves whisp'ring overhede
> Or the street cryes all about;
> Where I maie reade all at my ease,
> Both of the newe and olde;
> For a jollie goode booke whereon to looke
> Is better to me than golde."

For the busy Hut Leader there is little time for reading, save in the line of preparation for conference, or class, or address. At times when business is slack at the counter, he may turn over the pages of *Pickwick* or *Nicolas Nickleby* with something of the old delight in the inimitable humour and versatility of Dickens, or in some of the earlier stories of George Eliot, glean some of her great thoughts that feed the hunger of the mind. In the busy days at the Front one's mind is absorbed in the study of other books—the book of life, the book of experience, the book of humanity, and the book of history in the making. These books the Hut Leader will read, and their profound meaning and realism will leave an indelible impression on heart and life. Sometimes on a short Sunday walk he will fall back on the literary stores of earlier years of home and student life, and ruminate on the seed which is laid up in the granary of Memory, and can be brought by Recollection, his servant, who, as our great poet says,

> "... does on him still attend,
> To reach whenever he for ought does send."

But to the Tommy in the brief period of reaction after strain, and rest after toil, a book may soothe, console, and strengthen, and the Hut library may prove a real boon and enjoyment.

AMUSEMENTS AT THE FRONT

VARIOUS excellent parties of musical artistes, in the desire to show sympathy with the men, and to brighten their lot with the charm of music, have braved the storm and danger of the Channel and the rough and ready style of life on the other side. They have done good service at the Base. But, for the entertainment of the Tommies, their performances come far short of the concerts organized by the men themselves at the Front. In our Division we had a Divisional Concert Party. A building just behind our buffet at Cross Roads, about a mile from our Hut, was called " The Divisional Theatre." The concert party consisted of six men, selected for their musical and histrionic gifts, and were told off, with a Lieutenant in charge, to cater for the amusement of the Division. They used to practise and rehearse in our concert hut daily. I shall never forget our concert party. Like the poor, we had them always with us, nearly every forenoon and every afternoon. They used to come about 9 A.M., and go on with short pauses till about 1 P.M., and from 2 P.M. to about 4 P.M. The tallest man of the company belonged to the Liverpool Scottish, and went by the name of "Scottie," though he was not Scotch. Over six feet, with broad shoulders and a fine physical frame, he looked well in his kilt and Glengarry bonnet. He was a good reciter, excellent at conversational dialogue and repartee, and a singer of no mean merit. He was the chief talker of the Company, and he could talk cleverly and well. We had one or two professionals—a comedian, and a baritone singer with a fine voice, who used to interpose with welcome effect, in the midst of much light comedy, a good old English song. The others were more or less amateurs, nimble of foot in the dance, and for the most part following the lead of the two Chiefs, "Scottie" and the comedian. The leaders were constantly originating new skits, dialogue, and local conundrums and hits. The chorus, singing with their own time and harmony and expression, was always well balanced and melodious. The echoes of "Kind, kind and gentle is she, kind is my Mary" and "Auld Lang Syne" seem now to haunt my memory with their pleasant strain—although at the time the incessant reiteration of practice heard by us in the other Hut, when we were at work, made us long for a change.

The concert party were a bit of a trial, at times almost a bit of a nuisance. They loosened the board of our platform by constant dancing and jumping on it: their clever pianist, with constant and vigorous playing, silenced two notes of our small portable piano; they used to knock our chairs about a good deal, and raise a good deal of dust. But they were a good set of fellows, and they and their Lieutenant were always amenable to correction and restriction in our Hut, so far as we thought necessary. They worked hard. It was their duty, and their performances had to be kept up to the mark, else they would have to go back to endure the hardships of the ordinary Tommy.

"I'm off to-day," said the Lieutenant.

"Where to?" I asked.

"To the trenches."

A few days later he came into the Hut to see his quondam concert party.

"What are you doing now?"

"Trench mortars," he replied, with a smile.

"Rather a change," I responded.

"Yes," he said, and seemed to add, although he did not, "it's all in the day's work."

His place was taken by another Lieutenant, whose nerves were a bit shaken, causing sleeplessness.

We were invited to a performance in the Divisional Theatre, and had places of honour reserved for us beside the Staff. The theatre was packed with some hundreds of men. We were but three miles from the Front, and in the close environment of war, but for the nonce we could turn our eyes and minds to the stage and its six players upon it in pierrot dress. It was a very warm summer evening, and they must have felt in the midst of their hard work little streams of perspiration trickling through the paint and flour dust and their facial disguise and adornment, but they went through it all with delightful gusto, nerve, and precision. It was a very clever, highly original entertainment of song, acting, recitation, dialogue, and story. One of the original little pieces was entitled "Before the War, and After the War," and presented illustrations of the change in shopping after the War, medical examination, dining, as compared with before the War. "Dining after the War" was portrayed in this way:—

London, in the city, at the telephone.

Major ——, ringing up his wife:

"That you, dear; may I bring Captain —— and Lieutenant —— to dine?"

"A nice little dinner in your best style."

"Soup?"

"O dear no."

"Meat?"

"Yes, say one cutlet for each of us."

"Potatoes?"

"Well, a very few."

"Bread?"

"Yes, say one half slice for each of us."

"Sweets?"

"O no."

"Cheese?"

"Yes, for once, as I wish to do it well."

The medical examination after the War prescribed the Spartan treatment of early rising, simple diet, and plenty of exercise. This sketch was keenly relished by these Tommies at the Front. There was some excellent singing, and some good jokes at the expense of the H.Q. Staff, the officers of which were beside us in the front seats, *e.g.*, that a job on the Staff was the thing for a man who had been knocked out, because it did'nt need brains!

The concert party used to play at various points in the division, going off in a motor lorry about five and returning about nine o'clock, and our little portable piano often went with them, for a piano at the Front is much in demand and hard to get.

There were one or two other sets of performers in the Division, who, in their time off duty, got up a good "show." Once in our Hut the "Venetians," as they called themselves, gave an excellent performance. One of the items was a place song on "Lancashire." Our men, many of them, were North Lancashires, and the hits and enconiums on the towns and villages of Lancashire "caught on" well.

Once a week we had an excellent instrumental performance by the Divisional Band, sometimes in our concert hut, sometimes in the open air in the field outside, from which we had a somewhat picturesque prospect of the village, with its roofless church, and the river, with open fields beyond. I used, as Hut Leader, to provide lemonade and cigarettes for the members of the band, as a small acknowledgment of their service. On one occasion, with the approval of the C.C., who was standing on the stage beside me, I made a short speech of thanks to the band, who, after a hard day's work on "Fatigue Duty" and "Labour Service," came to entertain us, and, remarking that the rendering of such music needed a happy heart, said that we had reason to be happy, seeing that we were fighting under the British Flag in the great cause of righteousness, and we were going to win. This little spontaneous effusion of gratitude on the spur of the moment was received with sympathy and applause. But it was not repeated, for speeches are seldom heard at the Front.

Our Hut billiard table was in constant use the whole day. We allowed the use of the table for an hour for 50 centimes, noting the names of the players and their times. The officers billeted near used to have a game after dinner. We had also draughts and chess, which were patronized free of charge. Sometimes, although the ground was rather rough, we had a game of cricket with the Tommies who cared to play. We lent our cricket things to those who asked for them, under certain conditions. Football was also a favourite game.

Thus the strain and high pressure of life at the Front is relaxed, and the pendulum of the war-clock suffered to swing back a little, to recover force to go on without stopping or losing time. The space in service at the Front for amusement is very brief, but it furnishes recreative power for the business of war. In the quiet of the Hut or the Dug-out, when the day's task is done, the strain will relax in the warmth of comradeship and the brief period of "off duty."

> "Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
> And merrily hent the stile-a;
> A merry heart goes all the day,
> The sad tires in a mile-a."

The Wise Man says—

> "A merry heart bringeth good healing."

MY FRENCH CLASS

I CAN read and write French, having learned to do so at school, but I have not lived in France long enough to speak it fluently and with good pronunciation. However, I concluded that I knew enough to help most of the men who wished to learn, so I resolved to start a French class. I chalked on the blackboard, amongst other intimations, "French Class, Thursday, 6.30 P.M." I had brought no text-books with me, but I made use of a small French conversation and pronunciation book, which we sold at 10 centimes. From my friend the Curé I borrowed a French grammar and reading book. Thus equipped, I waited for my class. Two pupils turned up, who knew very little French. We worked hard for an hour and a half to read and repeat the sentences for a shop, for the post-office, for the street, to go through the article, the numerals, etc. Perhaps the effort was too great and the faults too many; anyhow, one of my pupils, a window-dresser in a London shop, as I discovered, did not return. I used to see him at the cross-roads, as an M.P., regulating the traffic, and we often had friendly chats, but he came not again to my French Class. The remaining one was joined by two more pupils, and we took up the grammar and reading lessons, and made some progress. The text-book was meant for French children of ten to twelve years old, so the reading lessons were very juvenile, and generally ended with a moral for very young people.

It was comical to read and translate a story of a little boy, who, against the advice of his mother, mounted their dog for a ride, and was thrown into the mire, and on scolding his charger, seemed to have the response "Little boys ought to obey their Mamma." But I found that when I read and translated the lesson was easier for them and less discouraging to their earnest effort to acquire French.

The British soldier does not generally pick up much French, and he does not try to do so. He prefers to speak a kind of pigeon-French, which he finds is sufficient for use among the civilians to procure what he wants. He will do much by sign or gesticulation, and put in a word of French, or something like it, here and there. I remember seeing a Sanitary Sergeant-Major demonstrating to some French women the use of a tank of chlorinated water which had been set up, and he finished his demonstration with the word *"Compris."*

There is a War language, which adds to the original French and English forcibleness, and turns out a word which expresses better what is in the mind of the soldier than the single and proper French word would do. The word "Napoo" is a fine expression for "in vain," "of no avail," from the French *"Il n'y a plus."* He will use the words "No Bong" for "No good," and he has his own expressive English words, simple, straight and clean-cut, such as "Show," "Dump," "Wash Out," and "Carry on." The first time I heard the last phrase used was by a young subaltern at the piano to a singer in our Manse, where we had them for tea. He went to the Front soon after, and has fallen in the attempt to "Carry on" to the last. On the other hand, the French people speak very little English, but they understand the English necessary for business, and they follow easily the direct, forcible language of the Tommy, half French, half English, in which he tells them what he wants to get and what he wishes to be done. *Punch's* picture of the Quartermaster's orderly driving away some inquisitive French children from his stores is drawn from life when he says: "Nah, then, alley too sweet, an' the tooter the sweeter."

SOME FRENCH PEOPLE AT THE FRONT

THROUGH my son, I was introduced to a French family in the town where I began my work. He had been billeted with them in 1915, and they were exceedingly kind to me on his account, giving me the entrée of the house and a standing invitation to come to any meal when I was free to do so. Their house was in a quiet side street, with two prettily and daintily furnished rooms in front, and a dining room and parlour behind, through the windows of which one looked out on a large and beautiful garden of flowers and fruit-trees stretching far back. The kitchen accommodation formed a sort of annex adjoining the parlour, and running out into the garden. A building at the other side of the house was Monsieur's office. The family consisted of Monsieur and Madame, a son serving, a daughter at school in England, a younger son at school in Paris, and the youngest, a boy, at school in B——. Monsieur O—— was an extensive hop grower and hop buyer both in England and in France. Before the War, he went frequently to England on business, and could speak a little broken English. In the early part of the War the Germans were in B—— and seven miles beyond it, and for one dreadful week a number of officers were billeted in the house, the memory of which, Madame O—— told me, was like a nightmare, for she had to entertain them while her husband was away. Soon, however, they had to move back to the front that, two years later, has been broken. What a welcome the British got when they marched into B——, and, though only four to six miles from the Front, they knew that behind it they were safe from the inroad again of the Hun, though his shells and bombs might give trouble, as they have done since.

Monsieur and Madame O—— had much of interest to tell that had passed in their town in these strange and stirring times of war. More than once they had seen our King there, and witnessed the accident which was nearly very serious. They would bring my son and another Staff officer to meet me at the daintiest luncheon, served in the nicest French style, with coffee in the garden, where Monsieur quietly took snap-shots of the party and later sent us charming photographs to remind us of the happy day. Madame would come with me to buy lace for the home folks, and Monsieur would take me for a long walk. After a Sunday night service two miles off I would drop into supper and enjoy the kindness, charming social manners, and good French, of Monsieur, Madame, and their little son, to meet, perhaps, an English officer who had been in the Indian Mutiny, and was lecturing at the bombing schools. One felt the same kindness and welcome among the people of the town one met. We were but half a mile from the frontier of Belgium, and there was a strong Belgian element in the town, but the people were to me everywhere uniformly kind and pleasant.

In the village of S—— sur L——, where the latter period of my time of service was spent, I was billeted for three nights in the house of the Curé (priest) and his brother, the Vicaire (curate), and their sister, an interesting trio, about sixty years old. Although, for reasons already stated, they had to find me another billet, our acquaintanceship grew and our relations were sympathetic and friendly. The circumstances were for them hard, depressing, and difficult in the extreme. Born and educated at Arras and at a Roman Catholic college, the two brothers, unmarried, with their sister, had been for many years in S—— sur L——, the religious centre of a wide district for some miles round. In 1915 their fine church, an imposing edifice in a large open space of ground, was shelled, and, as we saw it, it was roofless, its ruined interior used as a military prison, the crosses and monuments in the churchyard much defaced and thrown down. Besides finding me a comfortable billet, they lent me a French Grammar and reading book for use in my French class. When I talked with them about holidays, they said there could be no *vacance* for there was no money nor time. Would the church be rebuilt after the War? They hoped so. Ah! the military occupation of the village had been disastrous. They were untiring in their devotion to duty—religious, educational, pastoral. The services were frequent, and were held in the school, where the children came daily for lessons under the superintendence of the Curé and the Vicaire. The services were largely attended, especially on Sunday, when work seemed to cease for the day to allow attendance at church for Mass by a devout body of people, including children, nicely and simply dressed, from far and near. They were mostly of the peasant class, who on week-days were to be seen early and late on the fields, cultivating their few acres, even out towards the Front, where the ground was broken with great shell holes.

One week-day afternoon I saw many boys and girls, from about eleven to fourteen years of age, with their parents going to church. The girls wore white dresses; the boys had a white badge on their right arm. Something unusual was the cause, and soon I learned that a confirmation of the children by the Bishop was to take place in the school, the quondam church of the place.

Duty in our Hut prevented my being present at the service in the church, but I saw at the close a very pretty little ceremony in the open air, on the grass behind, under trees, through the leaves of which the afternoon sun shone in bright shafts of light, suffusing the scene of life and colour with the glad radiance of heaven. The boom of cannon, the drone of aeroplanes, the explosion of anti-aircraft bombs could not shut out in that afternoon hour the atmosphere of sweetness and light and the inner-consciousness of God in this little French gathering of boys and girls for Confirmation. A circle was formed round the Bishop and other clergy, then a little girl in white stepped forward and read a short address of welcome and thanksgiving to the Bishop. Another little girl came up and made an offering of a bouquet of flowers, with a few words and a pretty curtsy. The Bishop put his hands upon the heads of the children, and, with kindly, smiling face, spoke a few words of benediction. The other children pressed forward to shake hands, forming a crowd round "his reverence," who seemed to enjoy the situation immensely, as well he might. Then the happy children went away with their parents in little groups.

One wondered what it all meant for them, and hoped that it had for them a spiritual significance, and would leave an impression to be seen in the life and character of after years.

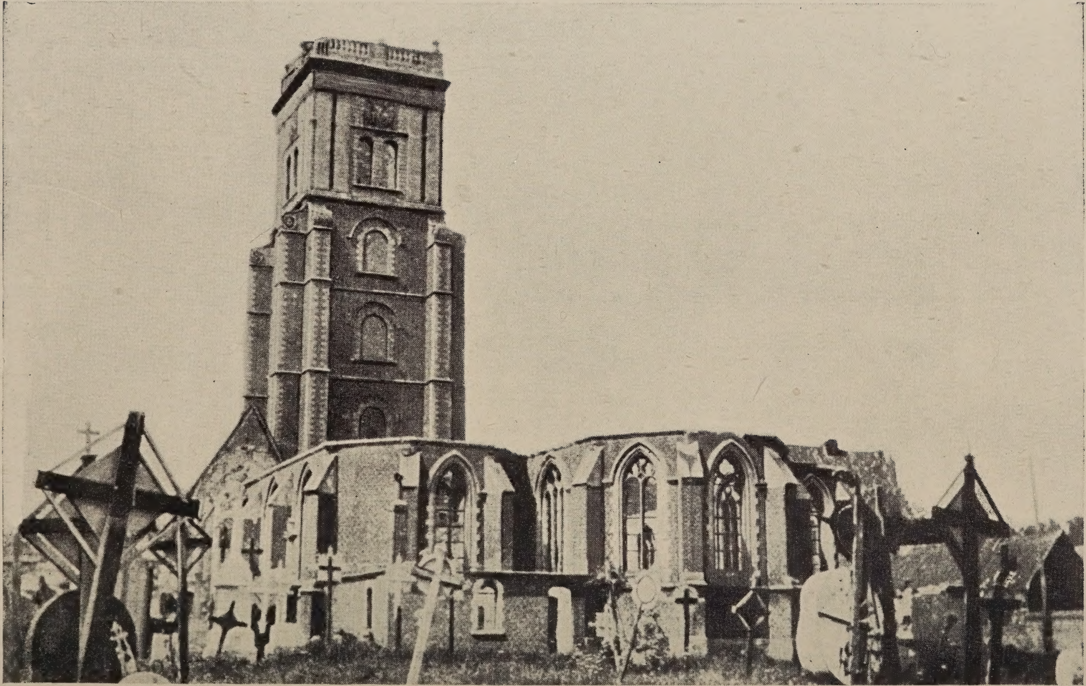
One thought that passed through my mind was that the French people in the suffering and separation and loss of war cleave to their Church and their religion—an outward evidence of the clinging of the immortal spirit to God.

The other thought stirred in my heart by this simple rite of Confirmation was its significance and use as a fulfilment of the Church's responsibility, along with the parents, for the Christian nurture of the young, and her wisdom in seeking from her boys and girls their response of conscious choice of membership with the Church as the testimony to their loyalty to the Church's Head and Lord.

Should the Church not wisely and dutifully lead her young people to see that she expects them, in earlier years than they are wont to do, to make profession of their faith in Christ, and to come to His Table? Would the Church not be more likely to hold her youth if, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, or even earlier, they were led to profess their faith in Christ and their desire to follow Him, and, if prepared, to come to His Table?

SOME MARKS OF WAR

DURING the month I spent at B——, about six miles from the Front in Flanders, which has been the scene of constant action since the beginning of the War, our town was not shelled. It might have been, as later it was, for on my way home I found that the casualty clearing station was being closed down owing to danger from shelling, perhaps from its nearness to the aerodrome. After my return home, a Staff officer, whom I had met there, said to my son he hoped I was not, if in France, where he saw me, as the place was now getting far more attention from the Germans than it did earlier. But while I was there we had occasional bombs. The night after my arrival a bomb struck the roof of a house, killing two of our soldiers billeted in the upper rooms. I saw the damage next day, which was great, and was very soon repaired. On a Sunday afternoon a loud bomb explosion was heard in a narrow street off the



Sailly-sur-la-Lys.—L'Eglise incendiée par les Allemands (Church burned by Germans).

See p. 77.

main Square. It killed fourteen civilians, and left its smashing marks and holes on the houses, and blew out much glass in the windows up and down the street, including those of the small hotel which I had left half an hour before. The funeral of these civilians was attended by a large number of the leading clergy and inhabitants, and as the long procession passed our Hut to the Cemetery, we stood at "attention" as a mark of sympathy and respect.

Two of the villages near the line which I visited had hardly a house that had not been struck. In these villages I was under shell fire. On one occasion as I began my lecture some half-dozen shells came over, but caused us no inconvenience. The houses in the village where, as Hut Leader, I spent two and a half months bore marks of shelling from our guns in 1915, for it was then in the hands of the Germans. The large Roman Catholic church was roofless, having been shelled by our guns to displace a German machine gun in the tower; the interior was in ruins, having been burnt by the Germans, and was used by our troops as a military prison. The central part of the swinging bridge over the river had been blown up in 1915 by one of our engineers, who succeeded after several had lost their lives in the attempt, and was awarded the V.C. In the wall of our Mess-room was a hole as big as your fist, made by a piece of shrapnel from the road passing through the shop window.

Occasionally we were shelled, but generally the shells passed over us and burst a little distance beyond, being intended for the reinforcement camp or the balloons. One afternoon fourteen shells came over us as I walked along the road near our village, but the range was beyond, as I learnt to judge by the sound. The neighbouring village two miles off fared worse; a factory was struck and several people killed or injured; a house was burnt and others partially destroyed. The women and children came running along to us for shelter, but returned in an hour or two. Our villagers, on the other hand, sought refuge when we were shelled in the other village near. One afternoon I was going to tea at the Bombing School. I had crossed the river at the bridge, and was nearing a captive balloon which was being lowered, when a shell fell near it, but, fortunately, it did not burst. In double quick time the platoon of balloonists had hold of the ropes, each one in his place, and had dragged it over the hedge and fastened it behind. They then sped away, the officers in motors and the men on foot, while I followed, with good reason, for soon another shell came which burst to our left in a field of corn, and did no more damage than making a huge hole.

One morning we set out on foot to visit our Huts in the town of A——, about five miles off, very near to the Line, and frequently being shelled. With one or two lifts from motor lorries, we reached it about noon. The guns from our batteries were booming as we neared one of our Y.M.C.A.'s at one side of the town, passing along a street where several houses two days before had been shelled and a woman killed. Our Y.M.C.A. in a large hall had been twice struck, and the same evening the house and shop where the workers were billeted. None of them was injured, and they were carrying on their service in the uninjured part of the building, and sleeping at their billet, while the woman in charge went on quietly with her work. Passing several sentries unchallenged—for an honest face looking through a Y.M.C.A. uniform was generally a sufficient passport—we crossed the railway and reached a second Y.M.C.A. in a square, which was called after a significant hour in its history at which the clock stopped—Half-past Eleven. Here, in a public building, a good business was being done. The town was given over almost entirely to soldiers. Few civilians were to be seen. Indeed, of 30,000 civilians only 2,000 remained, and later we heard that these too had been driven out with gas shells. A few shops endeavoured to carry on business; many fine houses were empty and shattered. On the streets one met little or no traffic, and only here and there a civilian hurrying along. It was like a city of the dead, its streets sounding only with the tread of armed men. No shells came over that day, strange to say. We now visited our third Y.M.C.A., in a large High School or College in spacious grounds, where in most commodious premises we found a young Varsity man as Leader, and my former assistant from New Zealand as co-worker; but in that part of the town troops were scanty and sales limited; only a Cinema, off a large chemical laboratory, drew goodly numbers at night. The café, known as the Officers' Club, where we went for some lunch, was all but "closed down," and with some difficulty we got an omelette and some coffee from the women in charge. Soon after our visit, the first and third of these Y.M.C.A.'s were struck, and the order went out that they must "close down."

The following poem from *Punch,* reprinted by special permission of the proprietors, vividly describes "Half-past Eleven Square" in A——, a little later than our visit to it on that memorable day:

HALF-PAST ELEVEN SQUARE.

There's a town I know in Flanders, an' there
ain't much else to say,
But it's pretty much like most towns when the
War 'as passed their way;

There's tumbled shops an' 'ouses, an' there's brickbats everywhere,
An' a place that British soldiers call " 'Alf-past Eleven Square."

There's a silly clock stuck up there that's forgot the way to chime,
With its silly fingers pointin' to the same old bloomin' time;
An' the world it keeps on turnin', but it makes no difference there,
For it never gets no later in 'Alf-past Eleven Square.

There's a stink o' gas a-crawlin' where the people lived before,
That it used to tell the time to when there 'adn't been no war,
In the day the whizz-bangs bustin', in the night the star-shells' glare,
An' 'oo cares what the time is in 'Alf-past Eleven Square?

You could walk for 'arf a day there, an' there's not a soul to meet
In the empty smashed-up 'ouses an' the empty sandbagged street;

They've packed their traps up long since an'
they've gone for change of air,
For you bet it ain't no 'ealth-resort—'Alf-past
Eleven Square.

An' it only wakes up sometimes, when the
armies come an' go,
With the transport an' the wounded an' the big
guns crawlin' slow;
But let 'em come or let 'em go, the clock don't
seem to care
If it's Fritz or Tommy marchin' through 'Alf-
past Eleven Square.

But it's waitin'—waitin'—waitin' till the world
goes on once more,
An' the folk come back to live there as they
used to live before,
An' open wide the broken door an' climb the
broken stair,
An' move along its fingers in 'Alf-past Eleven
Square.

Yes, it's waitin'—waitin'—waitin', just the same
as you an' me,
For the same world, only better than the old
one used to be;

An' I've got a barmy notion that I wish I might
be there
When twelve o'clock is strikin' in 'Alf-past
Eleven Square.

C. F. S.

As we walked back in the heat and dust of that afternoon, we saw from a village street, some two hundred yards off, three of our balloons bombed by a German aeroplane, and come down in flames, with nothing left by the time they reached the ground. The balloonists, however, had escaped in time in the parachutes, and were seen slowly moving aslant and descending safely to terra firma.

We had some heavy bombardment along the line from Y—— to A—— and on to La B——. For these ten or twelve miles up and down we could see and hear the flash of the guns when we walked out about a mile nearer the Front. Perhaps never was the bombardment greater than that preceding the memorable offensive at Messines. For three nights in succession the unintermittent flash and roar of cannon were like a thunder and lightning storm. The effect in the clear, star-lit night was grand and impressive. Then came the big explosion, the tremour of which we felt though some four or five miles off, but little noticed as compared with the house-shaking experience of nightly passing lorries laden with heavy ammunition. Next morning the news came that we had scored a great success. Weary Tommies dropped in from the field of action, and told us that after our bombardment there was almost no resistance as far as the third line, and at night a despatch rider, on a motor cycle, rode up, and we were allowed to stay and listen to the words: "Objectives all gained: 5,000 prisoners; casualties few." So we raised our caps and gave a cheer.

"It means," said the C.C. to me, "that we command eleven miles back behind the Messines ridge."

I was busy among our stores at the end of our concert hut one afternoon, when a German anti-aircraft bomb fell within twenty yards of our Hut, where I was at work. It was a "dud" —there was no explosion—otherwise it might have gone hard with our Hut and those in it.

When I looked out I saw a crowd of Portuguese soldiers round the hole. Two of them ran for a spade and dug the bomb out; it was some three feet down into the ground. This was a dangerous proceeding, and against regulations, which required the place where a "dud" fell to be marked and reported at H.Q.

As time passes at the Front, one has little fear of danger, not so much from familiarity as from the higher sense of duty and service.

A DIVISIONAL HORSE SHOW

ONE evening while we were at Mess supper, a Staff officer from Divisional Train Headquarters called to ask me to cater for about 300 officers at the Divisional Horse Show. It was afterwards arranged that for the first time there would be a canteen for the men as well, and I was asked to undertake it, that for the officers being left in other hands. On the Saturday afternoon I walked some two miles along the river bank in sweltering heat to the fields where the show was to take place, and saw our tent put up on a fine site near the enclosure. Early on the Monday morning following we filled up 2-horse waggons with our necessary equipment and goods—barrels, forms, chairs, mugs, jars of lemonade juice, cases of biscuits, cigarettes, chocolate, cakes, oranges, etc. Seated beside the driver of one of these waggons, I received the salutes of many coming and going on the busy road. The

Officer of Supply had helped me immensely by procuring the waggons, a staff of orderlies, and, above all, a Red Cross Ambulance cart which supplied us with properly prepared water. I put up two counters, one at each end of the tent, leaving space in front of each for the men to pass in queues. Our water cart, holding 100 gallons, with its pair of sleek and graceful, but funnily obstinate, mules, went twice for a supply of water. We disposed of 180 gallons of lemonade and sold out all our stock of eatables. The men were first-rate. How the Tommies enjoyed their fine drinks of lemonade!

The Show was wonderful. It was held on fields near the winding river, about three miles from the Front. A few weeks previously the Ambulance Section just across the river had been shelled. A large distillery in front of it had been struck, and a barge on the river behind it had been sunk. It occurred to me what a fine mark for damage would be the great gathering of the Show if the Huns got wind of it. But they did not. The horses—dray and cob—mules, and equipment—the procession of waggons of the Battery and Ambulance Sections

—were in splendid condition and superb in every detail, as if they were fresh from home, whereas they had, many of them, participated in a recent big advance. No one can match a Tommy for having things "A1" for inspection. Horses and equipment were most rigorously inspected. The slightest technical flaw meant disqualification, just as if the show were being held at home and witnessed by a crowd of holiday spectators.

In the afternoon the sky became dark, thunder rumbled, and clouds of dust came sweeping towards us. A cry arose that it was gas, but in reality it was a huge sand-storm, an unusual occurrence in these parts. The wind grew stronger, and we had to cling to the ropes of our tent and strengthen the pegs. It stood well. The other tents fared worse, where much of the crockery was broken. The rain came down, and we stood close, a jolly crowd underneath the covering of our tent.

Then it faired, the sun came out, and we got our forms out to the ring to form a grand stand for the Tommies to look at the horse-jumping, in which officers and men took part.

About 7 o'clock in the evening we packed up, and reached home safely, with the feeling of the Village Blacksmith—

> **" Something attempted, something done,**
> **To earn a night's repose."**

A GAS INSTRUCTION LESSON

NOT far away was a Gas Instruction School, where the pupils were trained and passed through the grim reality of facing and meeting a gas attack. One afternoon I went by special invitation and had a lesson from the Sergeant-Major, who acted as instructor. He was a tall, lithe, sinewy, fine-looking soldier, in the uniform of the Liverpool Scottish, of Scotch parentage, educated at Edinburgh University, before the War in business in Liverpool. He said he had been two years at this job, and remarked that a Gas Instructor was not expected to last more than one year. He showed us the trumpet connected with a chamber of compressed air, which would raise an alarm that could be heard miles away. He explained the various German and British gas shells, which he held in his hand, and made us sniff the chemicals producing the gas for tear shells, quite a pleasant aroma, but pernicious in effect.

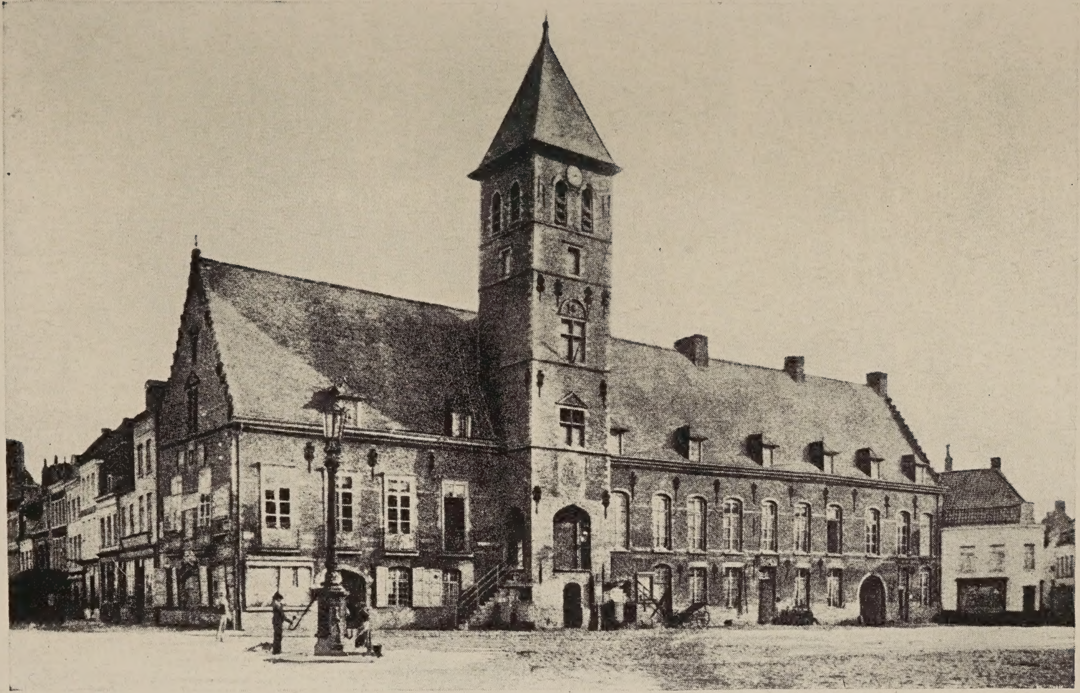
He then laid out the various gas helmets devised and used by us against German gas shells—the simple mouth respirator, the flannelette bag soaked in chemicals to go over the head, and the elaborate box helmet now in use. The head piece of this strange contrivance fits tightly on the head, a pair of pincers compress and close the nostrils, a rubber mouth-piece is held by the teeth, and is connected with a circular tube communicating with a square, flat box. At the top of this box is a lining of gauze and muslin, below which is a layer of charcoal, below that again a layer of soda lime saturated with permanganate of soda, under which is another layer of charcoal, while a lining of gauze and muslin covers the base, which communicates by a hole with the air outside. The gassed air, passing through these layers of chemicals, is purified and freed from all deleterious poison by the time it reaches the mouth. The used air passes out by a tube at the back of the box. Our instructor assured us that we gradually improved on the helmets used by the Germans, and have " gone one better " than they. He showed us the model trenches and preparations for test attacks of gas through which those being instructed were called on to pass day by day. How different is war to-day from what it was fifty years ago.

A GENERAL'S FUNERAL

A THRILL of sorrow passed through the whole Division when we heard that General B—— had been seriously wounded by shrapnel when visiting the trenches. We saw the ambulance carry him to a hospital near, and there the same night he died. Two days later his body was brought to the little churchyard, about half a mile from our village, and laid to rest among the crosses marking the graves of fallen heroes of all ranks, for death equalizes all and obliterates distinction and difference. We stood, a little group of Y.M.C.A. workers, at the gate: to one of us was given a wreath to hold. Within were many leading officers of the Division and of the Staff, including those of the French Army and Portuguese. A Church of England Chaplain had a short, simple service, the body was lowered, the wreaths were placed, and the buglers sounded "The Last Post." Then the officers trooped out of the little God's acre and stood talking beside their motor cars and horses, as if the funeral and open grave had been a thing of the past, but we could surmise that deeper down were thoughts and feelings that were held under by the duty of the present hour, which seemed to say, "Arise, let us go hence." The scene of General B ——'s funeral often comes back to me, for we loved him well. He was a good man, and his kind, sympathetic words at the opening of a new Hut beside us seem still to sound near and clear.

A TEA-PARTY IN THE HUT

From Y.M.C.A. Headquarters I had a letter asking me to entertain at tea in my best style in the Hut the workers in the district at a farewell meeting with the Secretary, whose regime over us would cease when our Division passed into another Army area. It was no easy matter. But I set about preparation as best I could. Tables, forming three sides of a parallelogram, but not joined, were put up in my retiring room in the Hut. From Madame of my billet I borrowed table-cloths, and was entrusted with her best china. From Madame of our Mess I obtained plates, knives, etc., and she made for us a large *crême* from custard powder. By a visit to the neighbouring town I procured cucumber for sandwiches, cherries, a cake (with difficulty), and bon-bons. Tea, biscuits, tinned pears and apricots, and cigarettes and cigars, we could ourselves furnish. Finally, from the garden near I got a present of beautiful lilies.



ESTAIRES.—Mairie, Hôtel de Ville (Mayoralty, Town Hall).

See p. 96.

The company, to the number of eighteen, including as guest a well-known Congregational minister from the Midlands of England, were able all to sit down comfortably. My one orderly was specially fit and efficient on that occasion. It fell to me to preside at one of the tables and pour out tea from a lofty china teapot with a long spout, which, being clogged with the tea-leaves, yielded no tea. From someone down the table came the suggestion to blow down the spout, which I did, and the scalding tea overflowed on my hand, to the amusement of the guests and the pain of the host for the moment. But the tea was voted " a magnificent spread," our Secretary affirming that better could not have been done in a first-class London restaurant. We had a few excellent speeches of farewell and encouragement, our English guest reminding us that even in the service behind the counter there might be something sacramental, while I put in a word for co-operation between the Church and the Y.M.C.A. in future work for the boys at home.

MAKING UP LEEWAY IN THE WAR

ONE of the strongest impressions left on one in the course of four months' experience and observation at the Front in France is the marvellous progress made by the British Army in military efficiency and equipment. The period of this long, drawn-out War, while imposing a great strain on the patience and endurance of the nation, has given time and opportunity for military training, education, and development, for the use of latent energies and resources, and for the perfecting of equipment, that in a more rapid movement of events would not have been possible. The result is remarkable. One thinks of our national position when, after the brave and almost incredible stand made by our small highly-trained Army to check the German advance, we found ourselves face to face with a foe that overmatched us not only in numbers, but especially in scientific military training, appliance, and equipment.

One of the finest things in this War is the effort of our nation, under great leaders, to make up leeway, so that by unceasing vigilant thought and activity we can now at every point of warfare meet the foe and surpass him. For raising and training the new British Army the credit lies chiefly with that great soldier and great man, Lord Kitchener; for increasing the supply of munitions the credit lies chiefly with Mr. Lloyd George.

But, apart from these initial and vital elements of success, improvement and advance have been constantly going on to bring the British Army up to the present standard of efficiency and strength.

In France to-day there is not only the Army fighting, but the Army at school and in the workshop, constantly undergoing training and development, and effecting improvement with a view to greater military efficiency and success. For example, at the town far forward which was for a time my Headquarters, we were employed daily in making a new railway. Within two miles of the Front, roads, with holes and ruts from the winter traffic, were being re-made behind leaf-like screen contrivances, to hide them from German guns. Close to our Hut was a great aerodrome, a scene of constant activity, to test new aeroplanes, which ultimately outstripped in speed the lastest of those of the enemy. In the town was a Casualty Clearing Station (which had been an asylum), a model of organization and administration and skill, under the charge of a large medical staff, with a Scottish Matron and Sister, and which, when I saw it on my way home, was being closed down for a time because of German shells. Adjoining the village, where later I had charge of a Y.M.C.A. Hut, about three miles from the Front, was a Bombing School, through which relays of men and officers passed for instruction in bomb-throwing, use of trench mortars, and all that appertains to that kind of warfare to-day.

The British Army in France is a great workshop, supplying all the necessary preparation and accompaniment to facilitate successful warfare at the Front. I went one afternoon into another village, that bore marks of having been several times recently shelled, to the R.E.

(Royal Engineer) Dump, to see if I could get the boiler of my buffet hut mended. I found the Royal Engineers' workshops of our Division in a great open space of ground, with large stores of iron and wood, having sheds for various departments of engineering. On the river alongside were barges for transport. The noise of clanging hammers and machinery, and the sight of a number of French girls employed in one shop, would have made one feel at home on the Clyde, had it not been punctuated with the sound of anti-aircraft guns or a bursting shell. I was conducted to the plumbers' department; my boiler was examined, and, though really too old for repair, was mended, and has since been going strong in providing hot water for tea or, when cold after boiling, for lemonade for thirsty Tommies fresh from the line. From any of these branches of military works in the Division, Y.M.C.A. Hut Leaders had the greatest kindness and the readiest help—a fine testimony to the way in which such work was appreciated by the military staff.

Beside our Hut was the Sanitary Section of the Division. They gave attention to wells, drainage, sewage, etc., so that the sanitation of our village and environment underwent an improvement, that served to keep our soldiers and humble Hut workers in good health. They warned us as to water, impure for drinking, and chlorined it for us, and in every way we were inspected and looked after and helped to carry out anything towards sanitation, so that we kept fit and had not a single day off duty.

The appearance and equipment of the British soldier would be hard to beat. I do not think the horses (dray and cob), the mules, and the equipment—battery, ambulance, transport—at our Divisional Horse Show, at which I was running a canteen for the men, could possibly be excelled. They looked, as they passed round the ring in the field—which, by the way, was within a mile of a village that had been shelled and hit a few weeks before—as if they had come out fresh from home, whereas they had been many of them in action in a memorable offensive a few days before in one of the biggest bombardments and most successful objectives of the War.

Other examples occur to one, who has seen what is going on near the Front, of the ceaseless activity, preparation, development of the accompaniments necessary to bring our Army up to the level of our foes, and even surpass them, that have contributed largely to our present superiority and success. The improvement already effected in training, military education, and equipment, the ability to make up leeway, have added an assurance and confidence to the native fine spirit of our men and their splendid courage, endurance, and grit; it is by these that we have become more than a match for the foe at every point, and that sooner or later we shall win.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AT THE FRONT

In a memorable motor run, after our Sunday morning workers' meeting, to a Y.M.C.A. outpost, where we were shelled, a leading Y.M.C.A. official in France asked me to keep before my mind the question of the religious life of our soldiers at the Front and their relation to the Church, and to report the results to a Committee dealing with the whole subject. The facts now given are taken from my own observation and experience as Lecturer and Hut Leader during my four months' service in France, and the inferences here stated are based upon these.

In the town Hut to which I was first attached we had a weekly conference on some topic, *e.g.*, Changes after the Napoleonic Wars, Russia, Prohibition of Strong Drink during the War, Canada, America, etc. The subject was generally introduced by one of ourselves, and then thrown open for discussion—interesting, suggestive, and lively. Generally one or two were present who had special knowledge of the subjects, and who could make valuable contributions to the Conference. The Leader summed up.

On " Prohibition during the War " we had an interesting discussion, including the question of the use of the " tot " of rum for the men in the trenches, and on a vote three-fourths of those present voted in favour of prohibition.

At one of the conferences, at which from fifty to sixty men were present, the question arose as to the relation of men at the Front to the Church. A frank discussion took place on certain points where improvement might be effected, especially in the Church of England, *e.g.*, as to the inequality of stipend, and the position of the laity in the government of the Church. No opinion adverse to the Church, far less to Religion, was expressed, although in some respects the Church was freely criticized. In reply, I said that the Church was conscious of human imperfection, weakness, and failure, but that through that we should press towards the great end of the Church's message and worship. The treasure may be in the earthen vessel, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. I asked those who were connected with any Church to hold up their hands, and more than half those present did so.

At the close of a Sunday evening service in the same Hut, when there was an audience of about 300, several of the men having different Church connection—Wesleyan, Congregational, Baptist, Church of England, Presbyterian—spoke to me of their conversion and their interest in the Church to which they belonged.

In Bible Class work here, and more especially in the Hut where I spent the latter period of my time, I had some interesting conversations, for the Class was not large, and with each of the men it was easy to become personally acquainted. At B—— two of the French Military Interpreters used to attend and take part. The number attending varied, seven, ten, twelve, twenty. All had Church connection except one or two, connected with the Moravian Brethren, or the London Evangelization Society, or the Plymouth Brethren. In the Class I took up such subjects as Christ the Example, Christ the Teacher, Christ the Redeemer, Christ the Giver of Grace, or made use of my own Primer as a text-book, *The Bible: a Revelation from God,* dealing with such themes as The Necessity, The Method, The Manner, The End of Revelation. The Class was, therefore, a serious effort at systematic instruction upon the great themes of religion. The interest was great. My talks were followed with close attention, and sometimes questions were asked. The same men returned when they could.

For the closing meeting at S—— sur L——, I had intimated that any question might be raised bearing on the Bible or religion. Some were propounded that were not easy to answer, *e.g.,* "What is meant by our Lord's preaching to the spirits in prison?" "Did the Saints rise from the grave at the time of the earthquake before our Lord's resurrection or after it?" "Why was our Lord spoken of as a Nazarene if born at Bethlehem?" "What is Faith?" The first two questions I answered by saying we must not press the details but simply accept the facts as accompaniments of a supernatural event.

Our Lord's beautiful words in the parable of the "Lost Sheep" and the "Lost Coin," "Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," disclose a wonderful fact which we receive, though its full significance we do not understand. In answer to the third question, I pointed out that our Lord's home was at Nazareth, and, therefore, he was called a Nazarene, though he was born at Bethlehem. On the last question, "What is Faith?" the conversation became personal, and thrilling in interest. In that small room with its canvas walls, dividing it from the writing room, and its open window, we felt almost as if Another were present, like the disciples of old, when they said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" I offered as an illustration of faith the personal trust we repose in one another in daily life, *e.g.*, the child in his mother, or the confidence put forth in the relation of buyer and seller in the world of commerce, and reasoned that faith is after all the same exercise of personal trust in higher degree, fixed upon a Divine and Eternal Person, even God in Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

The interrogator was a clear-eyed, intelligent, bright-faced young man from Lancashire. He had been a sanitary inspector before the War, and was now a Sergeant in the Sanitary Section. He belonged to the Church of England. Soon after my return home, I referred in a sermon to this question, " What is Faith?" from a member of my Bible Class in France and my answer to it. The following morning I had a letter from his wife, telling me that her husband had undergone an operation for appendicitis, and was now in hospital at Wimereux. I at once wrote to him a letter of sympathy, telling of the strange coincidence that I had been dealing with his question in my sermon at the time his wife was writing to me about his illness. At once I had a card from him to say he would write when he was able, and soon after a letter, from which I venture to make this quotation:

> " How strange you should think of me in your sermon. My question about faith often comes to me, and I find how very great a

> part faith plays in my life, especially up in the line, where something and some one in addition to a steel helmet is needed. Often I am reminded of faith being able to remove mountains, and it all brings me to thinking more of God and His great love for us and of His strength in protecting us."

He had known something of the wonder, the joy, the peace of believing.

There were personal incidents in our Class that will never fade. They asked for copies of my Primer, *The Bible: a Revelation from God,* through which I had taken them, so I gave each one a copy, inscribing his name on it, and the place and date. One of them, ill in hospital in another place, showed the little book and spoke warmly of the Class to the Chaplain, who passed on the incident to me. These testimonies, coming round indirectly, are worth mentioning for the encouragement in sowing they bring, like the breath of Spring. "And let us not be weary (lose heart) in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

One of the Class presented me as a parting souvenir with a German bayonet used in the beginning of the War. He was a chubby-cheeked youth from an English town. Before enlisting he had been a correspondence clerk. He had a pretty good secondary school education, and had early made up his mind to follow the Christian theory of life, and seemed never to have strayed from obedience to its ruling principles and guidance. He confided to me his desire to study for the Wesleyan ministry, and asked my advice. While putting before him the aims of the Christian ministry, I advised him to ask his father, whose approval he had, to write to the head of one of the Wesleyan colleges as to the course of study and preparation that would be required. He did so, and I have had letters from him since coming home on various spiritual themes and references. All the time that he is right at the Front in battle for King and Country, he is fighting the good fight of faith and seeking to lay hold on eternal life. I wonder if he will ever be a Wesleyan Divine, and how far he may have been shaped and educated for it in the school, the discipline, and the training of war.

With each of them I had delightful personal talks. Three of the Class in the Ambulance Section took part in a weekly meeting, conducted by themselves, for prayer and Bible conference, which on one occasion I addressed. One of them, who walked with me from this meeting to the Hut, told me how much religion meant to him in this time of war.

Four of the Nonconformist Chaplains of our Division, who used to meet weekly in our Hut to consider their programme of work, told me that in the men's letters which they censored they found appreciative and grateful reference, both to the Class and to the Sunday evening service.

Prayers in the Hut each evening were perhaps the best indication of general interest in religious services on the part of the men. A few minutes before 8 o'clock I used to go to the centre of the Hut and invite those willing to join us in our short evening prayer. There was a complete cessation of talk and business. No one left the Hut. Caps were taken off, and reverent and devout attention was given to the short passage of Scripture read, followed by prayer, terminating with the Lord's Prayer, in which many audibly joined. Business and talk were then resumed till the Hut closed. These short times of evening worship, for which men of all kinds gathered in the Hut remained, and reverently took part, afford better than anything else a pretty sure indication of the general tone and temper of life at the Front in its attitude to religion.

The Sunday evening service attracted a good attendance of men, some of them from a distance. The services were held in the concert hut, excellent for the purpose, with its stage or platform, from which the preacher could speak with freedom and with command of his audience in rows of chairs beneath. A small portable piano stood upon an empty biscuit box, and yielded excellent music from a skilled pianist, who might be a professional organist or musician who offered to play. Some of the boards of the stage had been loosened by the concert party of the Division dancing on it in their frequent, indeed daily, rehearsals. But the loose planks were lifted by my clever orderly and replaced with proper under girding supports, so that one, in speaking from the platform, felt that he was standing and moving about upon a good floor. Our small portable piano was in great request, and one or two of the notes had become dumb from the snapping of the wires, which the skill available, without the proper materials, could not repair. But it was a fine little instrument for all that, and served our purpose well. Before the service at half-past six o'clock, we generally had hymn-singing for a quarter of an hour, the favourite hymns being suggested by the men. At 6.30 the service began, and lasted about an hour, with psalm or hymn, reading from Scriptures, prayer, and a short address. It was all very simple and informal, straight, earnest, and hearty, concluding with "God Save the King" and the Benediction. After the service, a group of men would remain singing hymns at the piano; others would talk a little way off. Business, which had ceased at the counter in the other Hut during the service, was resumed after it was concluded.

We had fortnightly Communion and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at the close of the ordinary service. This was arranged with the cordial approval of the Chaplains. One of them, a Church of England Chaplain, with my consent, had a celebration of Communion in the retiring room of the Hut on Sunday morning at 7.30. He used to lend me most kindly his case of Communion vessels, etc., for the service. In intimating that there would be Communion, I used to invite all who were members of any Christian Church, or who desired sincerely to follow Christ, to accept His invitation to His Table. Generally a half remained.

The last Communion Service, on the day before I left S—— sur L——, will be ever memorable. For it three-fourths of those present at the ordinary service remained. We sang Watts's well-known hymn:

> "When I survey the wondrous Cross
> On which the Prince of Glory died,
> My richest gain I count but loss,
> And pour contempt on all my pride."

The words of Institution of the Sacrament were then read in I. Cor. xi. 23-26, followed by the Prayer of Thanksgiving, after the example of our Lord. The bread and wine were then dispensed by my Hut-assistant, a minister of our Church from the North of Scotland. My address after Communion was on the words in the song of Mary, "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away." Alluding to my departure, under strong emotion, I spoke of my gratitude to the military authorities, the Y.M.C.A. officials, and the men, whose courtesy and hearty appreciation of our service, and their unselfish camaraderie, cheerfulness, courage, and ready response to the call of duty, would leave an indelible impression upon my heart. At the close of that last service we sang the hymn:

"God be with you till we meet again,
When life's perils thick confound you,
Put His arms unfailing round you:
God be with you till we meet again."

At the counter or in the canteen I sought not to obtrude religion. Home was a key to unlock the door of any mind and stir the thoughts, memories, and affections ever present there.

One afternoon, when we were not too busy, a "Tommy" came up to the counter.

"Well," said I, "what are you wanting? Cigarettes?"

"No, sir," he replied, to my great surprise, "I don't smoke."

"Don't you? You are a *rara avis* (a rare bird)," and so I began to talk of his home.

His father was dead, and with his mother lived a sister, whose soldier husband had fallen. He had been a farm servant before the War in Ayrshire, and was now a driver with a battery. He came several times after and used to speak often of home. I asked my wife to send a post card to his mother, to let her know I had seen her son, and there was a grateful reply. On my return to Scotland I chanced to spend a few days in the neighbourhood, and called and saw his mother, who had been all day at harvest, and his sister with her children. It was a humble dwelling. Oh, yes, they had heard of me and the Hut, and how pleased they were to know what I could tell of their soldier. When I spoke of his being a non-smoker, his mother said, "Charlie was aye a guid laddie; he never gaed me a thocht." Soon after this I had from Driver W—— a letter, saying he heard I had been taking an interest in "his folk at home," and was glad I had called on them.

With Scotchmen especially I have had great talks of home, especially those from my own parish or district, or from my native town, when reference to well-known streets and scenes would cause their faces to shine with thoughts and memories of dear old Blighty.

> "To mak' a happy fireside clime
>   To weans and wife;
> That's the true pathos and sublime
>   Of human life."

Even in the poorest home there are ties of memory and affection for the soldier far from it, fighting on the field of battle at the Front.

Sometimes with men going up to the line a natural opportunity would open up in conversation for a text. As one talked with two

Scotchmen, who had girded on their heavy kit and equipment, and were setting out for a few miles' tramp to the trenches, one looked wistfully at them, as the thought crossed one's mind that they might not return, and felt constrained to say, "Should you like to take a word away with you, men? 'If Thy presence go not with me, bring us not up hence.'" And their faces would flush with interest and response. The memory of these times is very sweet.

I have had talks with non-commissioned officers, Christian men, at supper on a Sunday night, and have asked such questions as this: "Is there indifference to religion among the men in the trenches?" and the answer was: "There is no man that goes up over the top that is indifferent to the thought of God—that is altogether without the consciousness of God."

Why is this true? It does not spring from fear or "funk" that cries out for help from any quarter. That quality which has been seen in our foes has in our Army been altogether absent. The Roman satirist says, "*Fortem posce animum, mortis terrore carentem*" ("Ask for a brave spirit, lacking the fear of death"). It is rather the reality and nearness of death that stirs in the depths of the soul the thoughts of God. It is the thought of the possible ending of life, or rather the possible passage of life through death to the undiscovered country lying beyond—it is this which stirs in the soul the consciousness of God and of Eternity. For both thoughts are there—the thought in the conscience that God is and that I must prepare to meet Him, and the thought that I shall not *all* die, as the heathen have said, that while my outward life may cease I shall live on in an Eternity of which I am conscious and long for. These thoughts are quickened by the presence, the reality, the nearness of death.

Writing to me recently a Staff Officer said: "I found these lines last night when I was in the office—my night on duty. I rather liked them. Do you? I think, from what I've seen, many a man must have made friends in time with Death out here, for the meeting is easy."

A PRAYER FOR THE ROAD'S END.

Let me not picture Death as one who stalks a helpless enemy,
To blot away the sun some day, and lay relentless hands on me.

Nay, rather let me think of him as one who in all kindness waits
At the road's end, when shadows dim, to draw me gently through his gates,

And lead me, like some kindly host, who gives a long-expected guest
The comfort that he craves the most—the hospitality of rest.

So may I think of him each day, while the road shortens mile by mile,
Guessing the word that he will say, almost familiar with his smile.

No foe with fury in his breath shall charge me from some ambushed place,
God grant I make a friend of Death long, long before I see his face.

Perhaps the writer is thinking here in his closing prayer how God may send Death as a friend and messenger to call us to Himself.

What, then, are the inferences and conclusions arrived at from these facts? The men at the Front are open to religious influences, and manifest largely the religious spirit. Their whole condition of life—so new, so strange, so unlike in its circumstances and environment to that out of which they have come—has awakened the slumbering instincts of many to a quickened interest in God, in the Bible, in prayer. I do not forget the soldier's removal from the social influence and restraints of home and the civilization of peace, his participation in the fierce and savage business of modern warfare, the strain and rigour and peril of life in a trench or dug-out day after day, and his exposure to the temptation of reaction when off duty, to excess, self indulgence, theft, and obscenity. But the hard and rough exterior of his life cannot quench the hidden springs rising beneath from a higher and better source. He has, like Abram of old, come out at the call of duty, not knowing whither he is going, but obedient to the call. The rigour and hardship of self-denial, the discipline of his military life, tend to brace and educate the finer moral qualities of his nature. In endurance, toil, hazard, difficulty, we are conscious of a moral grandeur, a thrill that is purifying, ennobling, divine. He knows that he is fighting for King and Country in a great cause for the right and the true. He is prepared to make the great sacrifice—to lay down his life—for the triumph of righteousness, freedom, and peace. He bears the imprint of the Cross in his heart. He is daily manifesting the power of sacrifice as he goes up the line. Whether he knows it or not, he is on the track of Christ.

"Long, long centuries
Agone, One walked the Earth, His life
A seeming failure;
Dying, He gave the World a gift
That will outlast eternities."

He has a renewed interest in the Bible. It has become to him a new book in the experience of war, as the great text-book of religion in its application to life. Its language of promise and of hope is altogether unlike that of any other book. A constant demand for copies of the New Testament manifests a hunger for the Bread of Life, of the which, if men eat, they shall live for ever. The attitude of devout and reverent attention of the men at prayer showed how little there was that was perfunctory or formal, how much there was that was deep, pervading the life of the soul, living and true.

A wistful earnestness and receptiveness in listening to the short address in the service were seen in their faces that are not often marked at home. All the manifestation of religious life at the Front speaks of reality and a living faith. Anything unreal, or superficial, in religion has no place at the Front: all that is true, earnest, and sincere, finds a ready response.

When one has conducted these services for some time at the Front, he feels that his faith is on trial, and that he must get at what is real and vital in religion. Nothing else will suffice for the soul of man, living the life of a soldier at the Front. Browning's fine description of the true religion is what is needed at the Front:

"Religion's all or nothing; it is no mere smile
O' contentment, sigh or aspiration, sir—
No quality o' the finelier-tempered clay,
Like its whiteness or its brightness; rather stuff,
Stuff o' the very strife, life of life, and self of self!"

There is not much said about religion by the men, but their interest in it and desire for it are seen in their attendance at the voluntary services of the Hut, and when a simple, personal talk leads up naturally to its place and use in life, its depth and reality are disclosed.

The following beautiful poem, the author of which was Mrs. C. T. Whitmell, of Leeds, who died a few months ago, which appeared in *The Spectator,* is no untrue picture of the religion that may be met with at the Front:

CHRIST IN FLANDERS.

We had forgotten You, or very nearly,
You did not seem to touch us very nearly;
Of course we thought about You now and then,
Especially in any time of trouble;
We knew that You were good in time of trouble—
But we are very ordinary men.

And there were always other things to think of,
There's lots of things a man has got to think of—
His work, his home, his pleasure, and his wife;
And so we only thought of You on Sunday
Sometimes, perhaps, not even on a Sunday—
Because there's always lots to fill one's life.

And, all the while, in street or lane or byway,
In country lane, in city street, or byway,
You walked among us, and we did not see;
Your feet were bleeding as You walked our pavements:
How did we miss Your footprints on our pavements?
Can there be other folk as blind as we?

NOW *we remember; over here in Flanders*
(It isn't strange to think of You in Flanders)
This hideous warfare seems to make things clear;
We never thought about You much in England,
But now that we are far away from England
We have no doubts—we know that You are here.

You helped us pass the jest along the trenches,
Where, in cold blood, we waited in the trenches;
You touched its ribaldry and made it fine.
You stood beside us in our pain and weakness;
We're glad to think You understand our weakness—
Somehow it seems to help us not to whine.

We think about You kneeling in the Garden—
Ah, God! the agony of that dread Garden—
We know You prayed for us upon the Cross;
If anything could make us glad to bear it—
'Twould be the knowledge that You willed to bear it—
Pain—death—the uttermost of human loss.

Though we forgot You, You will not forget us—
We feel so sure that You will not forget us,
But stay with us until this dream is past.
And so we ask for courage, strength, and pardon,
Especially, I think, we ask for pardon,
And that You'll stand beside us to the last.

L. W.

But if there is this openness, this receptiveness to religious influence on the part of the men, begotten in some measure by their circumstances and condition of life, which tend to deepen their consciousness of God and create a hunger for the realities that are unseen and eternal, what evidence of this is seen in their character and behaviour? "They are great," "They are splendid," is the opinion expressed by those who have been at the Front. It is not an extravagant sentiment, finding utterance in the glamour of a great service. In Hut-work one lives among the men, rubs shoulders with them daily, marks their ways and doings, their words and manner of life, and finds through all a morale that is noble, self-sacrificing, heroic. There are many more heroes among our men at the Front than those who have gained the "V. C."

Their physique, equipment, training, organization, go far, but their morale goes farther, towards winning the War. This is the secret of their steadiness and strength, their calmness and confidence, in the time of misfortune and reverse as well as in the hour of victory.

Perhaps the outstanding quality of their morale is *cheerfulness*. It is not the shout of exultation or excitement. It is a spirit too deep and calm for language to utter it. To endure the hardness of war without complaint or murmur is much. "No grousing!" is the motto of the soldier, and well does he fulfil it. But to take everything that comes with cheerfulness is something far finer and stronger. He is tired of war, "fed up but sticking it," and that cheerfully. In all circumstances he is calm, strong, cheerful, indomitable in spirit, no matter what comes. You find this spirit in the trenches. The O.C. will say, "They're lying out night and day, they're wet and cold, but still as keen as mustard." You see it in the hospitals in painful operations, or wound-dressing, or after amputation, with the prospect of a future thus handicapped for life, or when going up the line on some dangerous job. Ah! there may be underneath a seriousness, but in face and speech the spirit of good cheer.

One is reminded of the heroes of the New Testament who "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods," or of the Word of our Lord, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," or of the fine lines of Browning as descriptive of the "British soldier":

> "One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break,
> Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph.
> Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
> Sleep to wake.
>
> No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
> Greet the unseen with a cheer!
> Bid him forward, breast and back, as either should be,
> 'Strive and thrive!' cry 'Speed—fight on, fare ever
> There as here."

In the sunny days when the men are back in rest, when the rations are O.K., and life is a little easy and humdrum, you may hear the semblance of a "grouse" more in joke than in reality, but in dark times of misfortune, or check, or loss, you are up against that spirit that "greets the unseen with a cheer." I remember, by way of illustration, in an address, when I spoke of the need of appetite for food, if it is to nourish the body, and said, "You like your rations, and therefore you are fed by them," a smile played on the faces before me for a moment, then passed. I knew what it meant.

> "It is easy enough to be pleasant
> When life flows along like a song;
> But the man worth while is the man who will smile
> When everything goes wrong."

Another quality also general and finely conspicuous in the soldier is *brotherliness*. The spirit of camaraderie is most apparent. It is seen in his kindliness and good nature, his sympathy, and his unselfish help. I have never seen a quarrel, nor heard an angry word among the men. Once there was a small skirmish between my two orderlies about the division of the work in the Hut, and each one came to me with his complaint about the other not doing his fair share, but when I said how it was to be, the reply was, "Well, sir, you're boss," and the two men were faster friends than ever. When coppers ran short at the counter, the purchaser would go down the Hut and say, "Have you any coppers, mate?" If he had, they were immediately forthcoming. As they stand by one another on the battlefield, so they do all through in the life behind the lines. A favourite colloquial term is "chum" or "mate." In his bearing towards us in the Hut, the Tommy was the true gentleman. No discourteous word, no unpleasant incident occurred to mar this impression. I do not recall one instance of profanity or intemperance. In their behaviour and demeanour, in their manner and talk, there was a fine courtesy, respect, truthfulness, and manliness. When help was needed, behind the counter, or in unloading stores, or in carrying on limber, or waggon, or motor lorry, goods to our buffet hut, how readily it was given.

The spirit of brotherhood in the British Army to-day would have gladdened the heart of Burns, when he sang:

> "For a' that, and a' that,
> It's coming yet, for a' that,
> That man to man, the warld o'er,
> Shall brothers be for a' that."

> "One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin."

At the Front the common toil, endurance, and peril, ever bring human nature back to its elemental simplicity and reality, and bind the hearts of the men together in a bond of comradeship and brotherhood, strong and lasting.

Such qualities of character and conduct made work among them a privilege and delight, and filled us with the desire to do our utmost for them, because they were worthy of our best effort and service. One parted from them with something of the feeling that ties of admiration, sympathy, and affection, were being snapped.

There is no affectation nor "side" in the manifestation of these qualities; they shine as the light does, spontaneously, unconsciously, without effort.

> "The glory of our life
> Comes not from what we do or what we know,
> But dwells for evermore in what we are."

WHEN THE MEN COME HOME

WHEN they come home, what will be the attitude of the young men of the country who have gone forth at the call of the nation to foreign shores, to the battle front, counting not their lives dear, who have passed through the storm of shot and shell, through attack and defence, through mud and cold of trench and dug-out, through wounds and death, through the strange experience of these awful years of modern warfare? What will their theory of life be after passing through the experiences of these times? Will there be reaction after the strain and toil and discipline of these years? How will they regard the Church? The impression and inferences remaining from the facts already stated are that the men will come home with a quickened interest in the Christian religion and in the Church—the readiness of one who being asked to go a mile will go twain. The Church may find that she has a great opportunity, and, therefore, a great duty and responsibility to use it aright. The Church need have no fear that she will lose the sympathy of the young men, who have been at the Front, in her work, their interest in her message, their support of her ministry and ordinances—if in her relation to them she is simple and earnest, sincere and real, human and brotherly, and if in her attitude to the changes and problems of life in the present day she seeks to maintain a mind open and ready to adapt and apply the truth and teaching of the Christian Faith to the demands and necessities of the hour. They will come home with an emphasized and accentuated antipathy to a religion of mere form and ceremony, however ornate and dignified, in which they cannot discern reality and truth. They will look for sincerity of soul and of character, harmony of conviction, feeling, and language. They will expect us to teach and preach what we believe. The gospel of the glory of the Blessed God will still be our theme, in its simplicity and fulness, but our preaching must ring true, must bear on present need, and be fraught with practical result, as the message of God to man. Let them find a warm spiritual temperature, the glow of love to the Saviour and devotion to His cause, the presence of faith, service, and sacrifice in the Church, and they will come in.

They will expect to find in the Church the welcome of sympathy, brotherliness, and love. The Church must not be official but human. She must hold out to them the hand of brotherly fellowship, and make them feel when they come that they have passed into an atmosphere of welcome. The P.S.A. movement has been popular and successful among men, because they have felt the bond of brotherhood that runs through it and holds it together, and that manifests itself in practical ways. The Church has had many opportunities of showing her sympathy and love for the men at the Front by sending letters and parcels to them, by caring for their wives and children, in guidance and advice, in sympathy and consolation in time of bereavement and sorrow, in frequent visiting at their homes, and in practical help. All such pastoral work will make the men think kindly of the Church, and glad to be in her midst when they come home.

Finally, the relation of the men who come home from the Front to the Church may depend on how far she can offer a welcome to the social problems, the political changes of the new world opening up before her, and find room for the new tendencies and thoughts and aspirations of the present day. The Church must be able to show that there is a message in Christ for present need, and that His Church is prepared to show interest in all that pertains to the social well-being, health, and happiness of the people. Why should she not?

The religion of Christ teaches the love of all men, the brotherhood of men, and self-sacrifice for others. Christ brings rich and poor together, and moves us in His service to seek a solution of those practical problems that so deeply stir society, and affect the interests and well-being of our brethren of mankind. They will expect also to find the religion of Christ permeating all spheres of secular life—literature, commerce, politics—and elevating and gladdening mankind; having the power to adapt itself to changing circumstances—not in the truth of its essential principles, but in its outward form, method, and application—by reason of its living spirit, inspiration, impulse, and freedom.

Open conference with the men on the part of the Church might win sympathy, and furnish many suggestions for change of method and improvement, such as are required by the needs of the hour.

In a word, the question to be faced and answered is not so much as to what the relation of the young men of the nation is to be to the Church, but as to what the relation of the Church is to be to them. It is the Church that must answer that question, not they.

In the life of the Hut—practical, social and religious, simple, human, and brotherly—there was for the men the atmosphere of *home*—to me a constant joy, and now a glad and grateful memory.

GOING HOME

As the period of service draws near the end, the preparation of the necessary "*Ordre de Service*" for the journey and other arrangements must be seen to. The final move is made suddenly. A. Y.M.C.A. motor arrives, and in half an hour all the kit must be ready packed. There is no time for last "Farewells" and leave-takings. Perhaps it is as well, for one would go with a sad heart from the men and the work and the fellow-associates in it. Two or three soldiers will run up to grip your hand as you leave; and, earlier, your sentries and M.P.'s at the cross-roads, when you say "I'm going to-day!" will reply, with a slight flush of the cheek, "Going back to Blighty, are you?" which may mean "I'm sorry," or "Would I were going," perhaps partly both. The little motor, carrying three of us and our kit-bags and other luggage, speeds away, passing Headquarters of the Division, where the D.A.Q.M.G., from whom I had many favours, and with whom I had had fine talks, waves a final good-bye. I have a night in the town where I spent my first month, and have my meals again amongst the officials at the Y.M.C.A. Headquarters. Next day I am taken for a tour with the Secretary round the outposts, now served by tents, instead of huts, still in the " Dangerous Zone " however, and doing a big business by day and by night. In the afternoon I pay a visit to the 53rd Casualty Clearing Station, and find that it is being closed down owing to shelling, perhaps due to the proximity of the Aerodrome. An inventory is being taken of all the hospital equipment, and the staff are busy. A conjurer, connected with the Y.M.C.A., is to give an entertainment, and the staff are having an early tea. I am welcomed by the Sergeant-Major to their Mess-tent, but one of the Commissioned Officers takes me to have tea with the C.O. and his staff as their guest. The Colonel C.O., a distinguished surgeon, says he thinks they will be able to open up the Casualty Clearing Station in a fortnight. Then we adjourn to the large dining hall, and I have a seat of honour beside the C.O. Mr. H——, the conjurer, calls me behind the curtain, and asks me to say a word of introduction for the Y.M.C.A. I comply, and the performance goes on, and excellent it is, without a hitch, carried through with light and clever little jokes and badinage—especially about the two Tommy assistants, who good-humouredly do as they are told, and enter with zest into the fun. One little trick of producing yards and yards of ribbon, representing the colours of the Allies, from a small jar, during which the conjurer made the men sing, "Keep the Home Fires Burning," was both pretty and effective. He received a warm vote of thanks on the call of the Colonel.

In the evening my son, with whom I had the night before got into touch by the Town Major's telephone, was able to come. We dined together, and far on in the evening he sped away back to duty, to be up at 3 A.M. for important work preparatory to the big offensive in the end of the month. I got away by the early train next morning, after showing my Passport and *Ordre de Service,* and receiving a military ticket.

At C—— we had time for a hurried lunch, and reached Boulogne in the afternoon. There I was hospitably entertained at the Y.M.C.A. Hostel. I found the three ladies in charge of "The Scottish Churches' Club" very busy, as across the Bridge was "out of bounds" for the men, and consequently they flocked to the one available "Home from Home" on the free side open to them. Next day I ran out by tram-car to Wimereux, to call for a Scotch nurse, and see something of the hospitals facing the beach at the pretty, clean, French village. Then in the afternoon, after passing through most careful examinations by various officials, and receiving the necessary stamps on my Papers, I got on board the steamer, and, with the usual escort, steamed across the Channel to our own shores. How kind everyone seemed to be, what a welcome they gave us—the railway and tram servants and the hotel people—and how pleasant it all was to feel that they were trying to be specially helpful, just because one had been at the Front!

I had a Sunday in London, a great Church day. How I did enjoy the Church services after these months of absence, finishing up with an evening meal at the home of a well-known clergyman, whose congregation has done much for soldiers arriving in London when they come home and go out. Next morning I reported myself at Y.M.C.A. Headquarters, and very briefly touched on points of my experience, fitted to be useful to the busy officials at Bedford Square. I had the great joy of meeting the Secretary of our Army Area on leave, and said to him I would almost like to return with him to the scenes and to the men who have taken such a hold of my life and my heart.

After his return to duty in France, he sent a letter to the Session-Clerk of my congregation, which may be published as an illustration of Y.M.C.A. appreciation of a minister's work:

EXPERIENCES OF A HUT LEADER

Young Men's Christian Association with
the British Armies in France,
The Second Army Area,
August 8th, 1917.

Mr. John Macleod,
Session-Clerk,
Monzie United Free Church,
Gilmerton, Crieff, Perthshire.

Dear Sir,

Absence on leave in England has prevented me writing you earlier, just to say how much we appreciated the service of your Pastor, the Rev. George Henderson, out here in France.

Although well on in years he rendered splendid service—and only yesterday one of the leading officers of a Division said to me that he tremendously missed going around to our hut and having a chat with Mr. Henderson.

It was exceedingly fine of him to come out and to be so willing to do anything in his power, and we appreciate the sacrifice your Church made in allowing him to come.

Yours very sincerely,

H. N. HOLMES,
Secretary Y.M.C.A., 2nd Army.

The Scotch Express carried me speedily across the border—how much more rapidly than a French train would have done—to "Home, sweet home." A day or two later I visited, on a day of rain, a beautiful loch, some twelve miles westwards in Strathearn. The proud hills in their heathery dress never looked more grand and splendid, with heavy clouds falling and rising on their tops, than they did to me, after these months in the flat battlefields of France and Flanders.

"East or West—Hame's best."

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